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ABSTRACT

This study on accountability designs for underperforming schools focuses on probation as a tool for policy. Findings are based on the analysis of state performance data, the reading of approximately 100 school improvement plans, and the study of 11 focal schools in Maryland and Kentucky. Test-score data from Maryland show that probation is associated with an initial reversal of decline in the worst performing schools that fades out in subsequent years. Teachers in the 11 schools fundamentally do not buy into the accountability system. Low job commitment diminishes the threat of low-performance penalties. Many teachers were skeptical about the goals, felt unfairly judged by the system, and did not judge themselves according to the standards of the system. The accountability system also does not provide meaningful tools for self-evaluation. To a large degree, mild pressures and directives molded the teachers' responses to probation, with the principal being the system's conduit. The result was that probation, by itself, did not trigger much self-directed action on the part of the great majority of teachers. The four volumes and appendix contain the following parts: (1) analytical framework and study design; (2) the accountability systems of Maryland and Kentucky; (3) probation and performance motivation; (4) organization responses to probation; (5) planning for school improvement; (6) probation and instructional change; (7) summary of findings and discussion; (8) case studies; (9) the politics of accountability for school improvement in Kentucky and Maryland; (10) case study research guide; and

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Schools on Probation in the States of Maryland and Kentucky. Technical Report. Volumes I – IV [and] Appendix.

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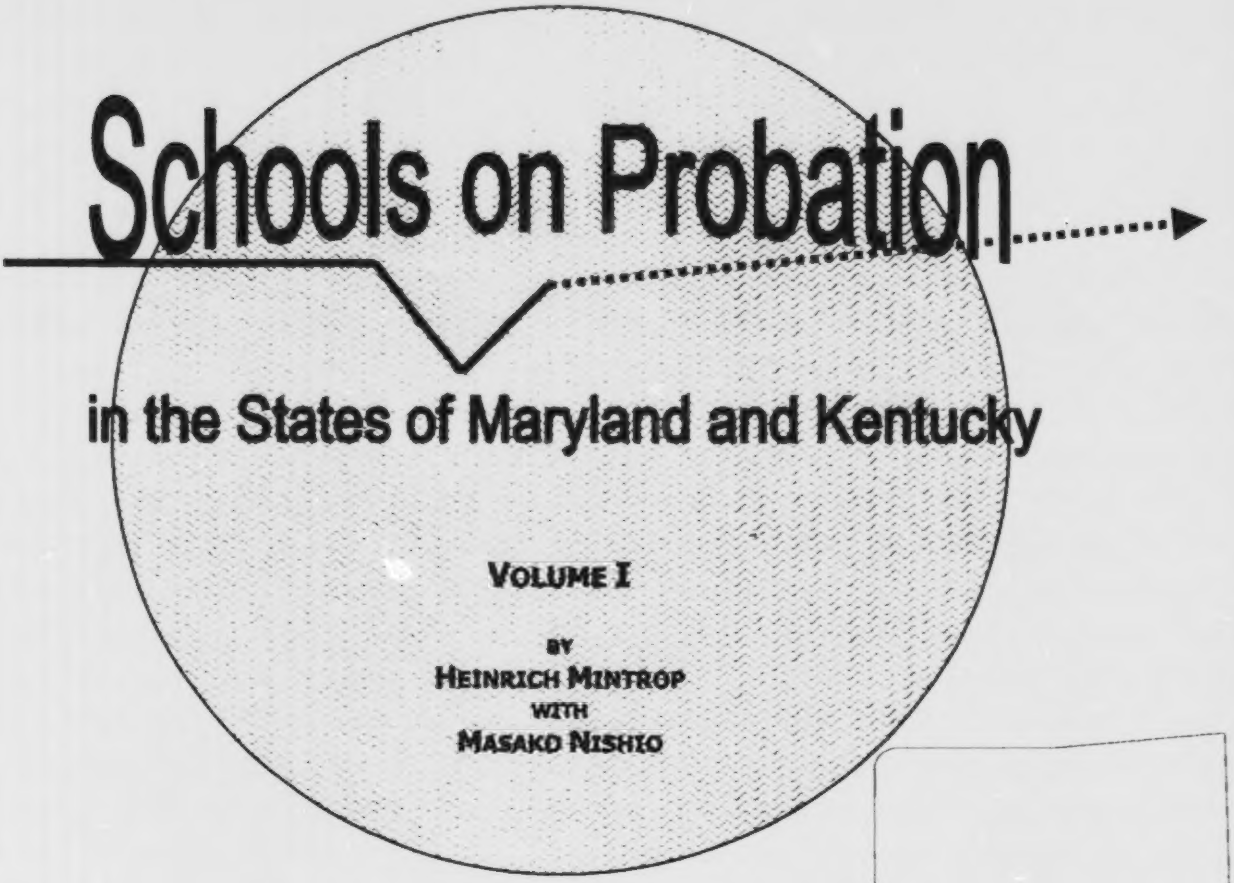

Schools on Probation

in the States of Maryland and Kentucky

VOLUME I

BY
HEINRICH MINTROP
WITH
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TECHNICAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO
THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FIELD INITIATED STUDY:
THE EFFECT OF RECONSTITUTION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Probation as a Tool for Policy

Across the United States, incentive policies that reward schools for good performance and penalize them for failing to maintain acceptable performance levels have proliferated. The sanction of probation works on schools in several ways: it may attach a stigma, make a threat, heighten scrutiny, issue a warning signal, or symbolize public concern and commitment. We define probation as a performance status, institutionalized in various nomenclatures, that publicly identifies a school as underperforming according to stipulated criteria of its accountability agency. This report describes what schools do when they are put on probation.

Once a state department of education or a local district has put a school on probation, four main policy levers define its relationship with the school: sanctions, performance standards and assessments, process controls, and resource provisions. Sanctions, standards, controls, and resources may exert pressure, activate goals, constrain actions, or enhance capacities on the part of responding schools. Pressures in the form of public stigma, threats of more severe penalties, and scrutiny may activate teachers out of fear or discomfort; standards and assessments may provide the orientation for teachers' own goal formation and focus, process controls may stipulate specific organizational or instructional behavior by mandating planning features or instructional programs, and resources may raise the competence of individual educators or the strength of organizations.

In dealing with underperforming schools, accountability system designs in the U.S. differ in the way they balance sanctions, standards, process controls, and resources. In this report we looked at two such designs, the Maryland and Kentucky accountability systems. The two designs have in common that they measure performance with pedagogically ambitious assessments. They differ in the way they identify underperforming schools and in the provision of resources to these schools.

The Study

Our findings are based on the analysis of state performance data, the reading of approximately 100 school improvement plans, and the study of eleven focal schools in two Maryland and four Kentucky school districts. The eleven schools serve a student population characterized as "at risk" due to high poverty and high disadvantaged minority attendance.

Schools on Probation Show Initial Reversal of Decline and Slow Incremental Growth

Test score data from the state of Maryland show that probation is associated with an initial reversal of decline in the worst performing schools that fades out in subsequent years. Schools on probation, identified when they are in steep decline, overall keep up with performance increases of the state as a whole and in some cases outperform the state's growth rate, but performance increments are too small for schools on probation to close the gap between their low performance level and the state average within a reasonable time frame. Thus test score data suggest that probation may have some effect on schools, but its effect is weak.

Pressure, Meaning, and Capacity

Three broad categories that define schools' responses to probation lend themselves to summarize our findings: pressure, meaning, and capacity. We conclude from the study's evidence that mild pressure, lack of personal meaning attached to the goals and classifications of the accountability system, high sense of personal capacity, and varied levels of organizational capacity and capacity building plausibly explain schools' responses to probation.

External Pressure is Mild

While most teachers at the eleven focal schools say they are aware of their school's status, they lack detailed knowledge of the mechanics of the accountability system. Harsh penalties (e.g., zero-based staffing, teachers' job loss) make no sense in teachers' view because these measures ignore current job holders' indispensability for a hard job that does not have too many takers. Indeed, policy makers in either state have applied final sanctions sparingly (Maryland) or not at all (Kentucky). The threat of further penalties is a distant possibility for most teachers.

Job Commitment is Low

Low job commitment diminishes this threat even further. Large proportions of teachers, particularly in the Maryland schools, are ready to leave their school on probation, but even in Kentucky where job commitment is higher teachers' prime reason to leave their school is to evade the additional pressures of probation. Probation is not a threat, but a nuisance due to the school's public stigma and the "fish bowl" atmosphere in which teachers now carry out their daily duties. External pressure is mild.

Educators Associate Probation with Need for Additional Help

While the state might use probation as a signal to communicate performance deficits to schools, large numbers of educators reinterpret probation as a resource-deficiency status that indicates the schools' need for support and additional resources. When probation is decoupled from support, it stirs resentment and defiance mainly among experienced and seasoned teachers although generally teachers are willing to comply with external demands and directions. Compliance, however, is not a dynamic that stirs high performance.

Educators Overwhelmingly Deem Their Accountability System as Unfair, Unrealistic, and Not Reflective of the Qualities of Good Teaching

Relatively small numbers of teachers perceive their accountability system as fair, think that the performance goals are realistic, and believe in the evaluative validity of the system for good teaching. In their failure analysis, teachers externalize and de-personalize causes of underperformance. First and foremost, they see environmental factors such as the low socioeconomic status of students as the key factor with regard to school failure. Teachers state that the tests are not geared to the reading and comprehension levels of their students. Doubts prevail about the calculation of scores and the wisdom of overly ambitious performance-based standards. Teachers are more prone to evaluate themselves based on observable behavior and reactions from students and other adults at school than on the state's assessments. Personalization, incrementalism, and a basic skills orientation prevail over data-drivenness, ambitious growth targets, and performance-based pedagogy. The gap between the states' demands, on one hand, and the needs of the students and the reality of the schools, on the other hand, is strongly felt. It is an underpinning of teachers' self-image that students come first and that instruction needs to be adapted to their students' abilities and motivations. For the most part, educators in these schools derive meaning for their work from sources other than the accountability system that they believe has unfairly declared them failures. Educators from the eleven schools heed the system, but they do so without conviction.

More Highly Motivated Teachers are Even More Skeptical about the Accountability System

Teachers that are reportedly more highly motivated by probation do not attach more meaning to the accountability system. On the contrary, those that reportedly exert more work effort are at the same time more skeptical about the value of the accountability system. Likewise, in "moving" schools that are characterized by more educator activism compared to "stuck" schools, teachers on the whole are also more skeptical about the fairness, realism, and validity of the accountability system. Thus, the evidence from this study suggests that performance motivation due to probation is largely unconnected to a positive valuation of the accountability systems.

The Accountability System Does Not Provide Meaningful Tools for Self-Evaluation in Many Educators' View

While the systems insufficiently tap into teachers' personal performance standards, they tap more forcefully into teachers' concerns for professional status. The problem is that the desire to exit probation is divorced from performance self-evaluations and self-directed steps for improvement. As a result, school improvement for the majority of the teachers in the eleven schools is mainly directed from without, through prodding by administrators, instructional specialists, external consultants, staff developers, etc. whose activities are moderately fueled by a common desire among teachers to be rid of the stigma and scrutiny that probation entails.

Maryland Schools Become More Rigid; Kentucky Schools Stress Continuity of Effort. Schools' Strategies Show Some Degree of Alignment, But Lack Focus.

In the Maryland schools, probation primarily triggers managerial initiatives on the part of anxious administrators and mobilizes career teachers working on compliant teachers whose commitment to the organization is nevertheless shaky. In some schools this results in a strengthening of hierarchy, control, and ultimately effectiveness, in others in strife or fragmentation. All schools engage in extensive professional development, implement mandated programs, and run test preparation schemes. Some alignment with key features of the assessments is detectable, but schools' strategies are not clearly focused. Only in a few schools is the intervention fine-grained enough to reach daily instructional routines. None of the Maryland schools unfreeze and engage in a process of internalizing accountability, that is, of finding meaning in the probationary status, a process that might have involved a personalized analysis of performance shortcomings and an active search for solutions that are appropriately adapted to classroom realities as perceived by teachers. When compared to the Kentucky schools, this connection between probation and organizational rigidity appears to be fostered by conditions specific to the Maryland schools: more anxious principals meet less experienced, more transient, and uncommitted staff.

In the four Kentucky schools, schools are more autonomous in their programmatic and strategic decisions, the relationship between principals and staff are said to be more collegial and supportive, teachers do not report an increased tightening of management as a result of probation, school improvement plans show more signs of internalization, (in some schools) responsibilities are shared between principal and site counsel, and the Highly Skilled Educator dispatched by the state is involved in the school's inner workings and invested in the school's success. However, teachers are even more skeptical about their accountability system, and probation is of lesser concern. Teachers and administrators stress continuity in their effort regardless of the schools' status. The schools engage in curriculum alignment and an intensive search for new external programs and consultants. These activities are pegged to the state assessments, but also result in a proliferation of new specialized services. Work on teacher performance expectations and instructional routines, tasks that are advocated by the Highly Skilled Educators at some of the schools, are less in evidence.

Teachers See Themselves as Highly Qualified

If probation sends a message that something is awry with employee performance in the organization so targeted, that message is not received by teachers. Across the eleven schools, overwhelming majorities of teachers consistently rate themselves as highly qualified educators who are well prepared, highly effective and caring, with a strong sense of efficacy, with skills that match the challenge of accountability and high performance, and with the willingness to exert above-average effort. Far from being tainted by their schools' designation as lacking or failing, these teachers express certainty about their professional quality and worth. The sentiment prevails that teachers do the best they can under the circumstances. This is not to say that educators at these sites do not see room for improvement. Many concede low test scores and shortcomings of their school's services. But they perceive their students as needy and their schools as resource-starved. Hence, improvements are associated with upgrading and expansion of services that require the infusion of fresh resources.

Organizational Capacity is a Key Factor

Meaning is clearly not the key factor that induces an acceptance of the mild pressures of probation, but capacity is. In those schools where probation is perceived as merely punitive, the signal is more strongly resented as an expression of additional neglect. Teachers that are more motivated to increase performance as a result of probation are also the ones who see district and state interventions and capacity building measures as more forceful for improving their school. Schools identified as "moving" are supported by their district with additional resources, and in those schools teachers see interventions and capacity building measures as more effective for school improvement relative to the "stuck" schools.

Strength of Collegial Relationships and Perceived Skills of Colleagues Make a Big Difference

Internal organizational capacities are key factors in molding teachers' responses to probation as well. The case studies show that without skillful and determined principal leadership schools are at a loss. In some schools with poor leadership the signal of probation is largely ignored while in others, where the signal is more strongly present, it makes the negative consequences of lack of leadership more acutely felt. Higher levels of performance motivation and the higher observed activity levels in the moving schools strongly coincide with teachers rating their colleagues as more skillful and their faculties as more collegial. Of all the factors related to organizational capacity, these are the two factors on which moving and stuck schools as well as teachers with higher and lower levels of reported work effort differ the most.

Teachers Do Not Teach According to the Performance Demands of the Accountability System

Although majorities of teachers across the eleven schools stated they had the requisite skills to teach according to the performance expectations of their accountability systems, classroom observations show that teachers rarely teach according to these expectations. Many teachers' lessons are not adjusted to the pedagogy emphasized by the core assessments in either state although most observed teachers make attempts to incorporate tasks and activities that have been identified to specifically prepare students for the state assessments.

The Gap Between High External Performance Expectations and Students' Low Performance Does Not Provide an Intense Learning Experience For Many Teachers

Why do the high performance expectations of the two state systems not provide greater challenges for teachers to make their instruction more intense and intellectually complex? Our study found a number of reasons: (1) As already mentioned, the assessments used by the states hold little meaning for many teachers as adequate measurements of their own performance; (2) The accountability system does not provide a bridge between the ideal of more cognitively complex and intellectually rigorous instruction and the perceived need to teach basic skills to *their* students; and (3) Many teachers do not perceive the gap between their own instruction and that envisioned by the assessments in either state as all that wide. They believe they have actually aligned their teaching to the demands of the system by having extended time for writing and group work, by drilling test vocabulary words and practicing test-specific writing formats, and by following district-adopted curricula and programs in the case of Maryland or attempting to cover as much of the state core curriculum as possible in the case of Kentucky. For these teachers, the reform task demanded by state standards and assessments does not amount to an intellectual upgrading of their teaching, but is interpreted as a more simplified and trivial incorporation of discrete instructional activities into their regular teaching style. For teachers who primarily comply or value high test scores for extrinsic rewards, that is, as a way to exit probation and not as a gauge of one's own performance, such a short route to maximizing scores makes sense.

The Reaction of Schools to Probation is Ultimately a Matter of Local Capacity and Not Common Response Due to Policy

While schools differ according to their capacity, pressures and meanings may apply to them regardless of site variation. But in these two components, the examined probation policies are weak, with the exception of principals in Maryland who experience strong pressure, but who are also confronted with a rather unconcerned staff. Judging from the eleven focal cases, schools' reaction to probation can be best explained with a combination of external pressure and local capacities and capacity building, absent a strong valuation of the accountability system. Pressure varies dependent on the determination and leadership skill of the principal. If the principal does not amplify external pressure in his or her school, probation is largely ignored. Thus, the reaction of schools to probation is ultimately a matter of local capacity and not a common response due to policy.

Improvements in the Policy

How could probation policies be improved? One could argue for a tightening of pressure, enhancement of meaning, and investment in capacity.

More Pressure?

Some external pressure is needed. Given the large performance gap between external expectations and observed instruction, teachers in the eleven schools on probation showed a conspicuous disinclination to assess themselves critically. But increased pressure may sap teachers' job commitment to the already stigmatized school. In the Maryland schools, teacher turnover has reached a level at which it is no longer possible to argue that the "right" teachers, i.e. those that are presumably less willing to work hard, are leaving. If the policy was working properly, one would expect teachers with higher performance motivation and teachers in moving schools, overall, to have higher job commitment. But this is not so. When surveyed, means in job commitment for these teacher groups were not higher than for other groups that are less positively inclined towards school improvement. Thus, higher and lower motivated teachers are just as likely to leave their school. It is quite likely in light of our data that a drain of higher qualified teachers, a widely feared negative consequence of probation, may not have happened in the eleven schools exactly because probation pressures have heretofore been rather benign.

Enhance Meaning?

A second strategy to improve probation policy is enhancing the meaning teachers attach to the accountability system. Contrary to assurances by policy makers and high-level administrators that their accountability system is fair, this is not a belief that is shared by many teachers in these schools that struggle with extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Designs need to be adjusted so that more teachers in these schools feel that they are evaluated fairly. Teachers need to be evaluated on the results of their efforts. Year-to-year snapshots are wholly inadequate. Particularly in the Maryland case, growth targets that qualify for exit from probation need to be reachable in the medium term, or else they become meaningless. In both the Maryland and Kentucky cases, where the assessments are highly complex and ambitious, bridging mechanisms need to be found or strengthened that help teachers make sense of ambitious goals and standards in light of the low proficiency of their students.

For the most part, the eleven schools show that clear standards and pressures alone do not make teachers into self-directed developers of instructional techniques. Rather, standards have to be meaningful and instructional technologies need to be developed that teachers can then adapt to specific student proficiency levels. Processes of organizational learning and internal accountability, so far preempted or neglected by probation policies, help teachers deal with the tension between high external performance expectations and performance realities of their students.

Investment in Capacity?

Investment in school capacity is key for the success of probation policies if findings from this study are an indication for the behavior of larger numbers of schools. Foremost, any positive movement we observed in the eleven schools had to do with either individual or social capacities available at the schools or provided to the school by external agencies. Teacher responses, as well, strongly point to the connection between performance motivation as a result of probation and social capacities (i.e. principal leadership, collegiality, skills of colleagues) at their work place. A similar relationship exists with regard to job commitment. Level of school capacity is the factor that best explains the variation in individual and organizational responses to probation.

Moreover, many of the schools lack the kind of baseline stability that is necessary for a cumulative process of school improvement. Without this stabilization, the school, now held accountable as a whole organization in both accountability systems by way of year-to-year snapshots, can hardly be considered the unit responsible for its performance and the strategic actor in school improvement. For teachers who participated in this study, the first priority must be placed on the improvement of the social conditions of teaching: more stable and skilled faculties and more support by community and authorities in enforcing appropriate student discipline.

PART I. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY DESIGN

1. Introduction

Failing public schools are a national problem. Highly publicized reports and manifestoes (Goals 2000, 1994; A Nation at Risk, 1983) have repeatedly put the spotlight on performance deficits in American schools. In recent years, more and more states and local districts have responded by creating standards-based accountability systems in the hope that such systems provide incentives for educators to improve their performance. Policy makers and the public are eager to see the results. While high-stakes accountability systems have been proliferating in many states as a means to effect a productivity boost in schools statewide, they are particularly popular in urban systems as a means to address the highly publicized issue of failing urban schools. A new "*no excuses*" of school reform has dawned, according to Hugh Price, President of the Urban League: "There are no longer any excuses for the failure of inner-city students to achieve. The landscape of urban public education is dotted with teachers, classrooms, and even entire schools that deliver the goods. The needed innovations have been designed and field-tested, and are now ready for mass market" (1997, p. 1). What is needed, it follows, are educators willing to avail themselves of these new effective practices. School accountability systems are designed to intensify the momentum for such willingness.

The urgency for improvement grinds against the stubborn reality of failing public schools, especially in the core of American cities. For example, in 1997 the city of Chicago alone identified a hundred or so public schools that managed to have fewer than fifteen percent of their students read at the national norm.[1] (Chicago Public Schools, 1997). A new "get tough" attitude towards habitually low-performing schools has taken hold in recent years as policy makers have raised the stakes in their accountability systems. Probation, reconstitution, loss of accreditation, state takeover, zero-based staffing and the like have been added to the educational policy arsenal. High-stakes school accountability is a bipartisan project. On the federal level, both Democrats and Republicans have pursued it. In his "Fourth Annual State of American Education Address" in 1997, then-Secretary Riley (1997) urged, "We need to stop making excuses and get on with the business of fixing our schools. If a school is bad and can't be changed, reconstitute it or close it down."

In 2001, high-stakes accountability measures have become a cornerstone of President Bush's educational agenda. Redesigns of Title I legislation give ample consideration to testing and sanctions. As of the year 2001, all 50 states have a testing program in place, 49 states have statewide academic standards, and 27 states have school accountability systems that identify low-performing schools. However, only nine states finance student remediation, seven states provide remedial funding to low-performing schools, and three states have formulated clear and specific performance standards, according to the ratings of "Quality Counts," a project of Education Week (Olson, 2001). Fourteen states, on the other hand, stipulate more severe penalties when an underperforming school fails to improve (Boser, 2001).

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[1] As measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Despite the growing popularity of "*get tough*" measures across the U.S., there is scant evidence of the policies' benefits. In most states and districts the imposition of sanctions on low-performing schools is still novel and nascent. In a few, among them the states of Maryland and Kentucky, high-stakes accountability measures have been in place since the early nineties and experiences have accumulated, but systematic studies of schools that labor under sanctions have heretofore been lacking. But policy making does not move at the speed of research. It sometimes moves more slowly when research suggests solutions that go against the grain of public sentiment, and more swiftly when, according to the spirit of the times, a policy measure makes intuitive sense as a sorely needed solution to an intractable problem that policy makers feel compelled to address.

As states increasingly identify schools with performance deficits and as the numbers of schools that operate under various sanctions and penalties proliferate, our knowledge gap becomes acutely felt. This report contributes to filling this gap by studying what schools do when they are put on probation, that is, when the public stigma of underperformance and the prospect of more severe penalties are employed to challenge educators to reverse performance decline and make improvements in their schools. We concentrate on schools that serve decidedly at-risk student populations. The main thrust of the report is not evaluation of policy, though an evaluative stance is often implicit. Instead, we describe the new phenomenon of probation and educators' individual and organizational responses to it and explain how these responses come about. We look at system-wide data from two states and conduct case studies in eleven focal schools. As we learn more about probation and the schools' response to it, we gain a better understanding of the potential effect of accountability and incentive policies on school improvement.

Knowledge about the effect of "*get tough*" policies is imperative for another reason. Not only are the benefits of these policies not systematically documented, the potential costs of sanctions call for careful scrutiny. High-stakes accountability policies have incurred political and motivational costs in some jurisdictions. If past events in two local districts, San Francisco (Ruenzel, 1997) and Philadelphia (Jones, 1997), are any indication, high-stakes measures can be contentious and divisive, potentially pitting state, local districts, unions, schools, administrators, and teachers against each other, upsetting the kind of consensus between policy makers and educators that scholars of earlier stages of school reform deemed essential for success (Elmore, 1990 & 1996). We are just beginning to understand how sanctions in low-performing schools influence teachers' motivation or behavior: Does it spell defeat or is it a call to action? Does it raise job commitment or does it add impetus to exit? Does it rally highly professional teachers or does it put them off? Does it induce learning and instructional changes among educators or does it freeze them up?

From a purely economic perspective, the imposition of sanctions in high-stakes accountability systems is first and foremost a means to increase the performance motivation of putatively underperforming employees. High-stakes accountability, in this conception, is resource-neutral; that is, improvements occur as a result of changed orientations and dispositions towards work effort. According to Hanushek (1994), past school reform attempts have not improved student performance and have encouraged waste of human and financial resources because schools and educators lacked clear performance incentives. A good incentive system is tightly linked to student performance. It specifies goals and leaves it up to educators to decide how to achieve them so that schools can pursue solutions that best fit their unique needs. Since the link between resources and inputs, on one hand, and student outputs, on the other hand, is weak and not clearly understood, a good incentive system balances "flexibility in the means of education" with "crystalline clarity regarding the desired ends" (Hanushek, 1994, p. 88). "Performance incentive systems are intended to attract and retain the best teachers and administrators and to focus their energies and abilities" on student learning (p. 90). Performance categories are mainly calculated on the basis of student achievement tests. High performance triggers a reward and low performance a penalty.

Not all conceptions of high-stakes accountability are as agnostic about process inputs as the above-cited economists' approach. O'Day and Smith (1993), reflecting on the use of systemic reform policies to address educational inequalities, postulate a combination of outcome-based performance measurements with opportunity-to-learn or input standards when evaluating a school's performance. But in their conception as well, incentives and sanctions are hypothesized to do a good part of the job. According to O'Day and Smith, when low performers prove non-receptive to performance information, the intensity of sanctions should increase. Schools, for example, are then put on probation. For underperforming schools on probation that fail to undertake self-correcting actions, reconstitution, i.e. the reconfiguration of the whole school organization by means of zero-based staffing or takeover, may be imposed. "*High stakes* in theory will increase motivation and performance" (O'Day & Smith, 1993, p. 286).

Policies intended to induce change are designed with a specific theory of failure and a theory of action in mind. That is, they make, often implicit, assumptions about their target problem and anticipate a way policy recipients will change their behavior. Redistributive policies (Peterson, Rabe & Wong, 1991) are guided by the assumption that under-performance is substantively a result of under-resourced learning environments; a high frequency of low-performing students in particular schools is evidence for the schools' needs for additional resources. Incentive policies, on the other hand, place the burden of responsibility for poor performance on employees' work effort. Under-performance becomes associated with failing teachers and administrators. Incentive policies target will over capacity. In its pure form, incentive policies direct new funds in the form of rewards to schools only *after* they have already turned the corner and have posted improvements. Without this lag time, poor performance would be rewarded and the effect of incentives -- positive as well as negative ones -- would be lost. In theory, an organization in free fall that was unable to stem the tide of declining test scores would be left alone until it crashes. In a pure incentive scheme, sanctions would intensify to a point at which site employees finally muster the energy to enact improvement strategies.

Thus, high-stakes accountability systems bank on the power of incentives and sanctions to motivate. In practice, districts and states tend to intervene much earlier with the infusion of new funds and technical assistance, and scholars of educational policy have stressed the complementarity of standards and sanctions with capacity building

(O'Day, Goertz & Floden, 1995; Massell, 1998). Nevertheless, for many policy makers and citizens concerned about the spiraling cost of education, the effectiveness of incentive policies per se hinges upon their motivational force in raising educators' work performance without large new infusions of resources and capacity building measures. Is this trust in the motivational force of incentive policies warranted?

Probation may work in several ways. The measure may communicate to the public that something is done about failing schools. If it is decoupled from forceful action, it serves a largely symbolic function as ingredient of a "*get tough*" policy talk. It may pose as a distant threat to schools that perform fairly well. Although these schools would in all likelihood not encounter the actual imposition of sanctions, they may nevertheless increase their performance to preempt such unlikely event (Kelley & Protsik, 1997; Firestone, Mayrowetz & Fairman, 1998). As an actual performance status for schools that fail to meet their performance target, probation may work in different ways. There is the threat of severe penalties that may instill fear; there is the public stigma of working in a failing school that may bring shame; and there is the wake-up call that may raise awareness of performance expectations. Finally, failed probation invokes or entails a draconian school reorganization that is coupled with penalties for personnel, such as loss of building seniority or even tenure. Probation as a school's institutionalized performance status is the topic of this study.

For high-stakes accountability designs, the effectiveness of probation is key for a number of reasons. In many systems (e.g., a state, county, or a local district), schools that persistently fail are not evenly distributed, but tend to come in clusters that coincide with poverty and often with concentrations of underprivileged ethnic minorities as well (Meyer & Zucker, 1989). When a system begins to apply stringent accountability measures (test scores, attendance rates, etc.) across all schools under its jurisdiction, these clusters become visible. In the state of Maryland, for example, most probationary or, what the state calls, "reconstitution-eligible" schools identified by the state are located in the city of Baltimore which has seen about half of its schools identified as reconstitution-eligible over the last several years. Chicago is a similar example, where staggering numbers of identified schools on probation are concentrated (Wong, 1999). It seems likely that the system's capacity would be overtaxed if within a reasonable time frame all of these schools would be targeted for drastic reorganization or overhaul. If all of these schools' faculties, for example, were to be subjected to a re-application process, actual reconstitution of schools in systems of high failure concentration may lead to drastic personnel turnover and may create a burgeoning system-internal labor market. Personnel would likely be reshuffled on a grand scheme among the failing schools that post openings while high-performing schools may "snap up" talented teachers and otherwise shield themselves from the stigmatized applicant pool.

In systems of high-failure concentration, then, a massive and swift overhaul strategy through reconstitution does not seem to bode success unless the system is able to terminate low-performing teachers' tenure *and* count on a sufficient supply of new applicants that are better educated and more motivated to take over "tough assignments" than the previous teaching cadre. The latter condition, however, may be doubtful in some areas of high failure concentration where problems with high teacher turnover rates and the retention of young, poorly paid and untenured educators abound (Argetsinger, 1998). Thus, in systems encountering high concentrations of failing schools, the success of high-stakes accountability systems hinges on the effectiveness of probation, that is, on the motivational impact of stigma, threat, scrutiny, and wake-up on the existing teaching force. In other words, the large majority of schools on probation in such systems must improve by working to avert final sanctions, rather than through the actual imposition of these sanctions.

Once an accountability agency, for example a state department of education or a local district, has put a school on probation, four main policy levers define its relationship with the school: sanctions, performance standards, process controls, and resource provisions. Sanctions, standards, controls, and resources may exert pressure, activate goals, constrain actions, or enhance capacities on the part of responding schools. In other words, pressures in the form of public stigma, scrutiny, and threats of more severe penalties may activate teachers out of fear or discomfort; standards may provide the orientation for teachers' own goal formation and focus, process controls may stipulate specific organizational or instructional behavior by mandating planning features or instructional programs, and resources may raise the competence of individual educators or the strength of organizations. But educators may not respond in these postulated ways. Conceivably, pressures and threats may foster inactive defiance or frozen rigidity, standards may alienate from cherished pedagogical aims and ideals, managerial controls may be counterproductive, and resources, if infused generously, may crowd out the sting of sanctions.

In dealing with their underperforming schools, accountability system designs in the U.S. differ in the way they balance sanctions, standards, process controls, and resources. In this report we look at two such designs, the Maryland and Kentucky accountability systems. They will be described in more detail in the following section. These two systems have been in the forefront of the U.S. school accountability movement throughout the last decade. Both systems are fairly elaborated and have established a track record that is longer than that of other more recently inaugurated accountability systems. Both of these systems also have the distinction of using as their central assessments a test that measures complex learning operations, higher-order thinking, real-life applications, cooperative performance tasks, metacognition and reflective writing across the curriculum. Hence, the two systems combine a press for more intense teaching with a press for a pedagogy that is innovative for many traditional teachers and in line with current thinking in the profession. In Maryland and Kentucky, schools on probation are not only challenged to become more effective, but also to engage in instructional reform.

But the two systems differ in some key aspects. For example, in Kentucky every school can potentially fall into probation if it does not meet its pre-established growth target and it can fairly swiftly leave this status once it is back on target. In Maryland, only rock bottom performers have to fear the probation label and these schools have to gear up to meet state average performance before they can leave the status. Also, while Kentucky provides technical assistance to its underperforming schools, the state of Maryland leaves capacity building to local districts for which probation rears the prospect of losing control of their schools in a final state takeover.

It is safe to say that even the more advanced and elaborated accountability designs in the U.S. are still in an experimental stage and design adjustments can be expected as more schools are identified as failing, possibly re-identified, and progress through the stages laid out by the system. This may especially be the case for the kind of hard cases, schools serving at-risk student populations, that we investigate in this report. While present American accountability approaches are embraced by some (McAdams, 2000; Tucker & Codding, 1998), they are condemned by others as exclusionary (Apple, 1993; Greene, 1993) and a detriment to thoughtful teaching and motivated learning (McNeil, 2000; Meier, Cohen & Rogers, 2000). Reviews of the pioneering Kentucky accountability system are less pointed, but nevertheless as mixed. Optimistic accounts (Pankratz & Petrosko, 2000), cautious at times (Foster, 1999; David, Kannapel & McDiarmid, 2000), contrast with accounts that make desirability and impact of the system doubtful (Whitford, 2000). A case in point is the fact that the state of Kentucky recently felt compelled to change its assessments and make its formerly mandatory technical assistance program an optional feature. This major redesign shows that even advanced accountability systems with a fairly long track record are still in the design experimentation phase. Both proponents and critics have a point, it seems. This study looks at two states. Although we do not compare the two accountability systems directly, a look across two distinctly different accountability systems and their varied effects on schools may help those that concern themselves with designing policy improve their instruments and will guide those states that are still in the design phase.

We explore the responses of Maryland and Kentucky schools to probation with five key questions in mind. Does probation:

- Coincide with a rise in the schools' performance scores?;
- Motivate teachers and administrators to become engaged in school improvement and increase work effort?;
- Foster individual and organizational learning in search for the means to improve?;
- Make the schools more effective?;
- Create momentum for teachers to change their instruction?

The report is organized into eight parts, plus a separate chapter on the policy process in the two states. Each question is addressed in a particular part of the report. Here we provide a brief synopsis for each part. In Part II, we introduce the two accountability systems as contexts for schools' responses and analyze performance data provided by the state. We show for the state of Maryland that probation did not coincide with a marked boost in performance scores for schools identified on probation, but the status, at least initially, was associated with a reversal of decline for the worst performing schools. Nor did schools in the Maryland system manage to exit probation, making probation for most Maryland schools protracted and lingering. The Kentucky system redesign that changed the format of the state assessments wiped schools' performance slates clean and made an analysis of test score data impossible for the period of our study. Test score data, by themselves, can only tell a small part of the story. But they point us in particular directions in the search for explanations.

In Part III, we analyze teachers' and administrators' performance motivation in response to probation with the help of interview and survey data from eleven focal schools. Probation policies may exert external pressure, foster meaningful goal development, or mobilize and enhance social and individual capacities at the workplace. We assume that probation will have to move beyond a dynamic of external pressure if the policy is to motivate changes in the instructional core. If teachers come to accept accountability standards as reasonable and fair despite performance shortcomings and if they have the opportunity and capacity to learn, such changes may happen. We show in Part III that for a majority of teachers probation is a nuisance, not a threat. Overcoming the public stigma and exiting the status is valued highly, but beyond that, deep skepticism about the accountability systems' performance goals prevails, and accountability goals have little meaning as guides for action. Although some experienced teachers express defiance, many more signal a willingness to comply. Contrary to the symbols of failure swirling around these schools, teachers perceive themselves as highly capable. Those who become more strongly engaged and exert more effort as a result of probation are not necessarily more committed to staying at their school, nor do they embrace the accountability system in larger numbers. But they do feel embedded in higher capacity work environments than less motivated teachers. Thus, in the prevailing motivational dynamic of probation teachers answer to mild pressure and external direction with individual and social capacities available at school and tepidly accommodate the accountability system. Although both accountability systems hold whole organizations accountable, group accountability in the form of sharing the burden of performance is not strongly developed.

In Part IV, we move from individual responses to a description of what schools as organizations do. To the degree that probation is perceived as a crisis of the organization, schools could try to master the crisis by engaging in organizational learning, or learning could be blocked as schools rigidify in the face of threat. In terms of social interactions and selected improvement strategies, Maryland and Kentucky patterns diverge. In the Maryland schools, highly concerned administrators confront rather modestly concerned staff in an environment of high organizational instability. This situation gives rise to a pattern of increased rigidity and compliance expectation that is bolstered by district programmatic and managerial mandates. Open conversations about the meaning of accountability goals that could facilitate internalization of the state's performance expectations are mostly blocked. When the principals are strong, they act as conduits of external pressure. Instructional specialists and staff development workshops, where provided through an infusion of new resources, enhance capacity. Implementing mandated programs and test-preparation schemes prevail as strategies, but many other programs and projects are adopted and tried out. We show in Part IV that in the Kentucky schools, compared to Maryland, school administrators feel less threatened and staff members are even more skeptical about the accountability system. Compared to Maryland, patterns of social interaction are more collegial and less hierarchical, district intervention is weak, and strategies, including those that align the schools' curriculum to the accountability system, are more homegrown. But similar to the seven Maryland schools, the strategic response in the Kentucky schools is fragmented and teachers become involved in a plethora of new programs.

In Part V, we expand this line of inquiry to a larger number of schools on probation with the help of a content analysis of about one hundred school improvement plans. As a mandatory feature for underperforming schools in both accountability systems, planning is employed to make schools more effective by forcing the low-performing schools to develop a focused approach to school improvement that is articulated with their specific problems and needs. Presumably, clear performance standards of the accountability system in conjunction with the pressures of probation move schools to focus on key goals and align their programs with content and instructional features demanded by the assessments. But at the same time, school improvement plans written for an evaluating agency outside of school have to be internalized if they are to become meaningful vehicles for school improvement. Part V shows that the analyzed plans lack signs of internalization. School action plans are very isomorphic across schools and accountability systems. They lack strategic focus, but at the same time, chunks of activities are aligned with the unique instructional features of either accountability system. Case study data from the focal schools show that the planning process is largely a managerial undertaking disconnected from most classroom teachers.

After studying individual motivations and organizational processes triggered by probation, we turn to classrooms in Part VI. We investigate how teachers taught in the schools on probation; how they reflected on their teaching; how they interpreted the pedagogical demands of the performance-based assessments; and how they coped with the presumed gap between the high demands of the accountability system and the reality of their students' performance. Classroom visits consisting of observations and subsequent debriefings generated the data to answer these questions. Part VI shows that teachers implement mandated or school-selected programs and make an effort to integrate test-specific instructional activities into their classrooms. The label of probation, rejected as unfair by large majorities, has nevertheless heightened awareness of the assessments, has brought in new programs and consultants, but has not exerted a strong press towards a more comprehensive reevaluation of curriculum and enactment of instructional change. We conclude our analyses in Part VII.

Part VIII contains the case reports from the focal schools. Here we describe in more detail how each of the schools reacted to probation. Previous sections of this report mainly summarize data across the cases. In the case reports, interpretation of the signal of probation, the meaning of accountability for teachers, individual and organizational capacities at the site, social interactions between staff and principals, planning, and improvement strategies are woven into one narrative that demonstrates how unique conditions among schools strongly influenced the schools' responses to probation. Parts I through VIII report on policy implementation, that is, the effect of probation on the lives of schools. In Part IX, our perspective shifts to the policy process that led to specific accountability designs in the states of Maryland and Kentucky. Finally, the report finishes with the list of references and an appendix that encloses the project's research instruments.

2. Analytical Framework

Can high-stakes accountability designs work? Generally speaking, scholars of education policy veer between deep skepticism about the power of policies to reform curriculum and instruction and a search for more rational connections between policy and practice (Elmore, 1992) The skeptics argue that the effectiveness of educational policy is hampered by fragmented authority (Cohen, 1996), divergent goals and incentives guiding actors on the various layers of the system (Elmore, 1988), and a general inability of policy instruments to "drive" the complexity of classroom instruction (Cohen, 1996, p. 16). Systemic reform proponents (Smith & O'Day, 1991), on the other hand, argue that accountability designs, if well articulated, coherent, based on complex standards of learning, and accompanied by the provision of necessary capacities, will trigger instructional changes that will lead to higher student achievement, "deep understanding of subject matter, and sophisticated reasoning ability" (Fuhrman, 1993, p. 2). Clear and ambitious performance standards coupled with accountability for results will tighten the connection between policies and teacher behavior.

For this study we define probation as a status of performance that may work on schools in five different dynamics: it attaches a stigma, makes a threat, heightens scrutiny, issues a warning, and signals support. Associated with stigma, probation is a performance status, institutionalized in various nomenclatures, that publicly identifies a school as underperforming according to stipulated criteria of its accountability agency. Associated with threat, probation is constructed as a transitory period during which the school is challenged to improve performance, at the end of which the school either exits the status successfully or faces more severe penalties. During this period, employees may be subjected to increased scrutiny. As a warning signal probation vigorously communicates external performance expectations and may function as a catalyst for change. As a signal of support, probation symbolizes public values and invites educators to identify with the public's concern for educational excellence. Thus, stigma induces shame, threat induces fear and anxiety, scrutiny induces discomfort, warning induces awareness, and public support and concern induces internalization.

In reality, high-stakes accountability systems are rarely pure incentive designs. Particularly in dealing with persistently low-performing schools, incentives are often imposed in conjunction with process controls and compensatory funding. While high-stakes accountability designs differ across experimenting jurisdictions, most probation designs are a combination of standards, sanctions, managerial or process controls, and capacity building measures. The performance of a school on probation is assessed by student achievement tests or other indicators. Schools are threatened with sanctions such as drastic reorganization, loss of tenure, or state takeover upon failure to improve. The assessment system focuses schools on clear goals that center on student learning. Most designs mandate schools, upon being identified as on probation, to undergo a formal process of school improvement, often stipulating the compilation of school improvement plans (SIPs) and the formation of responsible bodies of coordinated action such as school improvement teams (SITs). Adding a social component to the dynamic of performance improvement, in most accountability systems whole faculties, rather than individual teachers, are held accountable for increasing the school's organizational performance.

The school on probation is often subjected to more intense scrutiny carried out by monitors or other personnel dispatched by the accountability agency (state, district). Accountability designs differ in the degree to which they offer additional resources for capacity building.

Thus the pressure of sanctions does not work in isolation from all the other levers external agencies simultaneously use to encourage and structure performance behavior at school sites. The way accountability designs blend probation with these other policy levers will determine whether educators will perceive probation as more coercive or more supportive. For example, if probation is linked with a large infusion of new resources, sanctions may pale in the face of new possibilities. If programmatic mandates proliferate, the effect of sanctions may pale in comparison to all the process controls put in place that are justified by the schools' status.

The combination of sanctions, standards, process controls, and capacity building measures aims at motivating teachers to increase work effort, at channeling schools' activities into a rational, goal-oriented and coherent process of organizational learning and coordination, and finally at restructuring and intensifying instruction through teacher learning and instructional redesign. Thus, in order to gain an understanding of a school's response to probation, we need to look at three levels: educators' individual work motivation, organizational processes of effective management, and learning, and patterns of instruction and instructional change in classrooms. Corresponding to the complexity of the phenomenon of probation, the analytical framework for this study will draw from the psychological literature on work motivation, organizational theories on crisis behavior and organizational learning, and models of teacher thinking and instructional change developed by educational researchers.

Patterns of Performance Motivation

School accountability systems are characterized by a fundamental exchange between the organization's performance expectations and resources, on one side, and employees' needs, goals, skills, and energy, on the other. Organizational actors at the top of the hierarchy (policy makers and administrators at state or district level) expect employees to expend energy and employ their skills to fulfill performance expectations. Employees strive to meet their needs and goals drawing from organizational resources (Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975). This fundamental two-sided interaction between organizational and individual goals and resources is common to all organizations, but the installation of high-stakes accountability systems specifically raises the profile of organizational demands in this exchange. While complete congruence between organizational performance expectations and employees' goals cannot be expected, accountability systems work better to the degree that the two, accountability performance standards and educational and occupational goals and needs of educators, overlap. They work better, as well, when organizational resources and the sum of individual skills and energy are adequate to fulfill organizational performance demands and satisfy individual needs and goals, to the degree that both can be satisfied simultaneously.

Accountability systems can facilitate the overlap of the organization's performance demands with employees' goals when they succeed in motivating employees to link the fulfillment of personal satisfaction with the attainment of organizational goals. A basic link is the exchange between work effort and wages. Borrowing from Katz (1970), we distinguish for the purpose of this study between six patterns with which organizations compel employees to work towards organizational performance expectations: coercion, compliance, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, goal internalization, and social satisfactions derived from the work group.

Coercion

Strictly speaking, coercion is not a motivational pattern. When employees act solely due to overwhelming external force, they are not motivated, that is, they do not have a choice of action towards which to direct their energies (Vroom, 1964). As a school is put on probation, it may be exposed to threats of more severe penalties and close control and scrutiny. Threat and control may generate pressures that activate teachers out of fear. Employees coerced in this way want to shed the label of probation to avoid final sanctions that threaten them in some existential way with loss of job, seniority privileges, social relationships, or material benefits, and want to escape the watchful eyes of supervisors.

If coercion were the primary modus through which probation compelled employees, they would increase performance mainly because the disadvantages of the status and the consequences for non-performance would be severe, or external directions and controls would be stringent. Compelling workers to increase work performance through coercion is most common in work situations in which employees have few exit options and little autonomy. A sweatshop employing undocumented immigrants comes to mind as a prime example. But in less extreme settings, coercion is seldom an organization's prime mechanism to compel workers according to performance demands. As Vroom (1964) points out, employers more frequently utilize rewards instead of pressures. Coercion, if connected with fear and anxiety, is not associated with top performance. Rather, anxiety narrows one's task perspective. The impairment of performance through anxiety and fear is especially great for difficult tasks. In the case of schools, the motivational effect of coercion is doubtful. Teachers' work is complex, they are usually free of close supervision, have attained some protections against dismissal, and given their educational level are not without exit options in a favorable labor market. These kinds of conditions temper the severity of pressures an accountability agency is able to leverage, linking the motivational effect of probation more strongly to teachers being co-opted into the rewards and performance goals of the system.

Compliance

Compliance is a "function of generalized habits and attitudes towards symbols of authority" (Katz, 1970, p. 272), often but not necessarily always backed up by sanctions. When people comply with authoritative rules. Compliant behavior is enhanced when rules are attached to clear directions, when they are legitimate, i.e. deemed appropriate according to the role conception of the employee, and when they are reinforced by sanctions. The relationship between teachers and the authorities (i.e. the state and the district) has traditionally been imbued with a strong element of compliance (Lortie, 1975). Thus, teachers comply with the performance demands of the accountability system to the degree that the system is legitimate and provides clear and prescriptive directions. This is what Schwille et al. call policy strength (Schwille et al., 1988). As Katz points out, compliance is not a good way to motivate employees for high performance. Generalized role expectations of the system are applied uniformly to large numbers of people. As such, they are often acceptable standards on a basic or minimum level. When teachers comply with the rules of the accountability system, they accept performance assessments and institutionalized classifications because these issue from the rule-making authority of the state and define a performance status that is publicly legitimized. By acknowledging the system's legitimate power, they abide by the rules and modestly accommodate their teaching to the test. A district, for example, can mandate the teaching of a prescriptive reading program. Teachers comply in using the materials, but they are not necessarily motivated to excel unless they connect to the program in some other individually meaningful way.

Goals and Rewards

In the field of research on teacher motivation, little work has been done on the effect of sanctions on work motivation and school performance. Firestone and Pennel's (1993) review of the literature on incentives, teacher motivation and job performance highlights the connection between performance incentives, commitment, and job design. The issue of sanctions is touched upon very sparingly. Likewise, the literature on high-involvement management (Mohrman, Lawler & Mohrman, 1992; Mohrman, Mohrman &

Odden, 1996) looks at teacher work motivation in relationship to workplace structures and positive rewards for high performance. The latter is true as well for the literature on merit pay as performance incentive for teachers (Conley & Odden, 1995). The role of sanctions is largely left unexamined. An exception in this regard is Malen (1999).

Although the pressures of probation, in their varying degrees of severity, may cause discomfort and diminish job satisfaction, such diminished satisfaction may not necessarily translate into diminished job performance. Studies in the tradition of behaviorist industrial psychology have not found a clear relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (Lawler, 1973, p. 82). While job satisfaction is seen as related to commitment expressed in phenomena such as turnover and absenteeism, performance motivation is often conceptualized in relationship to sense of efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986), control (Weiner, 1986), clear goal setting (Locke, 1968), and rewards (Lawler, 1973). These varied, though related sources of motivation (Rowan, Chiang & Miller, 1997) are assumed to increase performance. Goals and rewards are key.

The combination of clear goals (i.e. measured growth targets), rewards for achievement, and penalties for failure that constitute high-stakes accountability systems, affects work performance positively if, according to expectancy theory (Lawler 1973), employees see their work as instrumental towards achieving rewards and averting penalties and if expectancy and valence of rewards are high. In other words, if teachers believe that the task of meeting external performance targets is in their control and they have the requisite competence for its execution, if they see a connection between individual effort and expected reward, if they deem the attainment of the reward likely, and if they value the expected reward itself, this motivational model would predict teachers to increase their performance. Thus, teachers strive for goals that are clear, specific, worthwhile, and attainable (Kelley & Protsik, 1997) and they calculate their actions according to the quantity, quality, and likelihood of rewards.

Kelley and Protsik use these models to explain teachers' responses to the Kentucky accountability system and its incentive program, which included pay awards for successful schools and the threat of drastic sanctions for persistently failing schools. In their sample of six schools that successfully improved performance, they found evidence for the motivating influence of the Kentucky incentives. Interviewed teachers saw their school's target score on the performance-based test (KIRIS[2]) as clear and attainment within their control (1997, p. 486). However, lack of control over student achievement over time was a particularly salient issue in schools with high student mobility. Teachers said they had changed their practice so that test and instructional formats would better match. Not surprisingly perhaps, teachers in these award-winning schools felt able and competent to achieve their goal. Interestingly, despite their schools' performance success, they were more motivated by distant fears of sanctions than reception of monetary rewards. In their comparison of the high-stakes Maryland accountability system with the low-stakes Maine accountability system, Firestone et al. (1997) found a similar fear of sanctions among Maryland educators, even through probation and reconstitution was a distant threat for study participants. None of these studies were conducted in schools that have already encountered sanctions. For those schools, however, distant fear of the unknown has transmuted into a known quality.

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[2] Kentucky Instructional Results Information System

Conceptualizing probation in connection with rewards de-emphasizes the coercive, threatening dynamic of the policy and transcends the minimalist effect of compliance. Stigma, scrutiny, and further sanctions generate mild pressure that motivates educators to strive towards successful exit from probation. Positively formulated, rewards consist of regaining a previously held status of professional recognition and autonomy, and retaining current levels of privilege. The rewards are extrinsic in nature if teachers buy into the performance standards of the accountability system mainly out of concern for professional status. For, both the challenges to recognition, autonomy, and privilege and the bestowed rewards are generated from outside the performing school or individual teacher. In this externally driven reward calculus model, teachers pursue high test scores as a means to regain professional status, and they act as long as they perceive capacities and probabilities of reward attainment to be sufficient.

To the degree that the striving for higher test scores becomes connected to educational concerns for learning and children, rather than to professional concerns for status, the work itself provides the reward and exiting probation becomes intrinsically valuable. High-stakes accountability systems introduce features to educators, such as clear quantitative performance targets and performance statuses, that increase momentum for a rational, goal maximizing reward calculus that may lessen the value of teachers' work for its own sake. But Deci (1975) points out that this is not necessarily so as long as teachers interpret the system's performance assessments and classifications (e.g., test scores, probation) as "informational," indicating achieved personal mastery, rather than "controlling." Such interpretations may depend on the intensity of pressure and control associated with probation.

Internalization and Meaning

When the intrinsic value of rewards is intensified to the degree that educators take over the performance standards of the system as their personal goals, then the system's performance objectives become individual value expressions and self-identifications (Katz, 1970).

Whether hinging primarily on extrinsic or intrinsic rewards, reward calculus models in general have been criticized as inadequate for educators. Speaking with Shamir, motivation theories that view the individual as "rational maximizer of personal utility" (1991, p. 406) are not sensitive to the situation of educators at schools. In Shamir's view, expectancy and goal setting models of motivation presuppose "strong situations." Strong situations are structured by clear and specific goals, reward expectancies, and clearly identifiable relationships between increased effort, performance, and reward. In "weak situations" where rewards are less abundant, where there is less tendency to differentiate among individuals on the basis of work performance because of collective orientations, or where links between performance and rewards are more difficult to construct, "point of action" theories of motivation, as he calls them, are less adequate. Point of action models of motivation are useful in predicting discrete task behavior, but they are less powerful in explaining a "diffuse and open-ended concept of commitment" (p. 408) to performance goals that refer to a "shifting number and range of rather ill-delineated performances rather than to ironclad and numerically constant behaviors having clearly defined parameters that everyone knows" (Marks cit. in Shamir, p. 408). Accountability systems, as currently constructed in the U.S, seem to aim at making the performance situation "strong," but their success will depend on the disposition of educators to infuse meanings into numbers.

For educators, a model of motivation based on the idea of "self-concept" and the moral and expressive side of human nature might be more appropriate. Central to Shamir's model is the idea that work instills "meaning" into individuals as it "connects the individual to the concerns that transcend his own limited personal existence." (p. 409). Individuals are motivated to maintain and enhance their self-esteem and self-worth. Self-worth is tied to a sense of virtue and moral worth and is grounded in norms, values, and moral obligations concerning conduct. Much work conduct, according to Shamir, is explained by internal standards, self-evaluation, and individuals internalizing performance norms of the work group. Internalized performance goals and standards are often times diffuse and not necessarily enshrined in clear expectations, short-range and specific goals, and receivable rewards. Meaningful performance goals are not merely expressive of task competence and achievement (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but tap into collective ideals and sacrifices that define an individual's identity. Shamir's model is echoed in studies that ascertain the importance of psychic rewards for teachers' work motivation (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975), as well as in the literature on teacher burn-out in urban schools (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

While reward calculus models of performance motivation that provide the rationale for probation view challenge, discomfort, and perhaps even stress as potentially positive stimuli for increased work energy and output, research on burn-out centers on the role of commitment and the negative role of job dissatisfaction on teacher behavior (Dworkin, 1987; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Burn-out occurs when, in response to job stress and dissatisfaction, teachers experience a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for their work. Their efficacy and sense of control becomes low. They feel a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and isolation in their work. As a result, they withdraw and externalize blame for their failure to their students, by whom they often feel victimized. Many burnt-out teachers desire to leave their jobs, but when no exit options are readily available, they become "entrapped" (Dworkin, 1987, p. 27). LeCompte and Dworkin estimate that in the early eighties burn-out rates among Houston city teachers were about 30 percent, even higher among white teachers in inner-city schools (1991, pp. 121-144).

Dworkin and others in this research tradition identify low morale and commitment as the key problems besetting schools in this milieu. They contend that any hope of improving schools will depend on finding ways to nurture a sense of dignity, professionalism, and support among dispirited faculties. Intrinsic rewards, sense of meaningfulness in teaching, autonomy or reduction of external intrusion especially in urban environments, and collegial support from the principal all have been identified as helping to prevent low morale and burn-out.

How might accountability policies impact teachers' commitment in this context? LeCompte and Dworkin analyze teachers' responses to mandatory competency testing as part of the Texas school reform effort of the mid-eighties. They demonstrate that Texas' across-the-board approach to implementing more rigorous standards for teacher competence increased burn-out levels. While prior to the reform burn-out rates were especially high among novice teachers and tended to fall with additional years of experience, the reform triggered a sharp increase in burn-out among senior teachers with 10 to 15 years of experience, an increase that only partially abated in subsequent years after the furor over the reform had died down. Thus the reform adversely affected those teachers presumed to have the highest work commitment and vestedness in the system. In short, it exacerbated morale problems for the very group on which solid school improvement strategies in all likelihood must bank. Although the thrust of high stakes accountability measures is different from teacher competency testing, the two have in common that they impose external standards on teachers, and that they do so regardless of individual performance or experience.

While the relationship between job motivation and performance, on one hand, and job satisfaction and commitment, on the other hand, is ambiguous in light of the discussed models, it seems quite possible that the same incentives and sanctions that researchers recommend as means to increase performance, particularly sanctions in case of non-performance, may be detrimental to teachers' commitment to remaining in workplaces where they already feel unappreciated. Accountability measures, then, can have two consequences: either the teacher feels challenged to reach a defined and attainable goal the accomplishment of which promises reward or aversion of penalties, in this case she is likely to increase her performance, or her feeling of being victimized by the system is further aggravated, in the latter case compliance, disengagement, and entrapment prevail unless the teacher chooses to exit the stigmatized and embattled workplace.

Conceivably, probation designs that emphasize stigma, threat, and scrutiny are conducive to coerced, compliant, or reward-calculating responses on the part of educators and counterproductive for commitments and motivations that tap into more strongly held educational values, personal and collective meanings, or ideals and sacrifices that are agnostic to rewards. Ideals and sacrifices have been said to be undercurrents in teachers' role conception and self-identity (Hargreaves, 1994). When probation designs signal to employees a more supportive relationship between the top and the bottom of the system, alerting educators of shortcomings in their performance symbolizing the authorities' commitment to the school's well-being, they may also stimulate teachers' own commitments to high performance expectations.

The Motivational Impact of the Work Group

Organizational theorists have recognized the work group as an important source of work satisfaction, commitment, and to some degree productivity as well (Katz, 1970; Tannenbaum, 1970; Mohrman, Mohrman & Odden, 1996). In the field of education, studies by Rosenholtz (1991) and Little and McLaughlin (1993) have shown that teachers increase their commitment to, and involvement in, reform when collegial relationships at school are strong, supportive, and innovative. With an eye to this social source of work motivation, school accountability systems hold whole school faculties accountable and upon failure to meet performance expectations put whole school faculties on probation. While work group relationships have been credited as motivators universally, their salience is heightened under conditions of group accountability in schools on probation because now, in the eyes of individual employees, attainment of rewards appears to be tied, not only to individual effort and capacity, but also to the energy and capacity of all organizational members.

Very little is known about how group accountability might work in the context of schools (Hanushek, 1994; Malen, 1999). Bolstered by a plethora of research on effective schools, the key assumption underlying this group approach is that schools as organizations are the most suitable strategic units for educational improvement. Tying the fate of teachers to organizational performance has been suggested by a number of researchers (Conley & Odden, 1995; Mohrman, Mohrman & Odden, 1996; Odden & Conley, 1992). Since little empirical material is available (Kelley & Protsik, 1997), the scholarly discussion borrows heavily from experiences in private industry. In light of these experiences, group accountability is seen as a means to motivate performance increases, to channel performance efforts towards strategic goals of the organization, and to generate high involvement of employees in the life of the organization. Some authors believe that group accountability may be a way "to motivate teachers and administrators to enact their jobs in a manner that leads to significantly higher student achievement, *sometimes without a commensurate increase in expenditures* [emphasis added]"

(Mohrman, Mohrman & Odden, 1996, p. 54). Group performance systems are believed to remedy the reported divisiveness that earlier, largely failed attempts of individual merit pay schemes induced in faculties (Malen, Murphy & Hart, 1987; Malen, 1999). Reinforcing the social forces of work motivation, group accountability may strengthen collegiality and a sense of collective responsibility. But these potentially positive effects may be mitigated by negative ones that could be of particular salience for schools on probation serving large numbers of traditionally underprivileged student populations under strained or embattled conditions, the kinds of hard cases our research focuses on.

Once the attainment of rewards (or the aversion of penalties) is tied to the group, individual employees may calculate that their individual effort will not make a difference, or conversely that they will receive the reward without individual effort. Likewise, the individual may gauge that she has the requisite capacity to be successful, but is uncertain that organizational capacities are sufficient to reach the performance goals.

There seems to be consensus among scholars that for group performance incentives to work, the goals need to be clear and attainable and the performing unit "should have control over a product, a defined set of services, or services for a defined population" (Mohrman, Mohrman & Odden, 1996, p. 67). But with a switch from individual to group performance incentives for a whole school, rewards and sanctions operate in "weaker" situations, in Shamir's terminology, as the loop between employees' effort and expected rewards is spun more loosely. As a result, group-generated performance motivation must tap into teachers' more broad-based and diffuse commitment to the organization. For, the chain from effort to reward for the individual teacher runs through the behavior of students, over which he or she has limited control in the classroom, through the behavior of colleagues at the site, over which he or she has no control due to the spatial organization of schools and traditional norms of autonomy, and through the behavior of the system itself, the orderly functioning of which he or she cannot take for granted in many instances. Hence, probation may not trigger a direct performance response from the individual teacher if the teacher is in fact strongly driven by a reward calculus. Group accountability then seems to resonate less with a reward calculus model of motivation and more with a model that places meaning and diffuse commitment in the center. The latter is more strongly mobilized when probation is interpreted by the group as a signal of public concern.

Schools on probation with high educational loads are in a special situation with regard to expectancies of rewards and their instrumental role in achieving them. If the accountability system's performance targets are applied equally across all schools and are ambitious enough so that high and average performing schools as well are challenged to increase productivity in meeting these targets, then persistently low-performing schools may face high growth expectations that may diminish expectations of success. Both accountability systems examined in this study have formulated high performance ceilings that schools are to reach within a fairly short time frame regardless of baseline performance at the inception of the accountability system. Unless performance standards are deemed realistic, expectations of success diminish and the incentive of probation loses its positive quality. The aversion of penalties (e.g., reorganization, takeover, loss of tenure) becomes an uphill battle.

Moreover, under conditions of high administrator, teacher and student mobility, often encountered in schools that labor under high educational loads, a sense of control may be lost on teachers. At a certain level of turnover, school operations become ephemeral and basic routine operations cannot be maintained. If this is the case, schools on probation may need baseline stabilization first, before they can hope to tackle more ambitious instructional reform. In these cases, the school site ceases to be the most appropriate strategic unit of educational improvement. Districts or states that provide the necessary externally induced stability or (as it often happens) instability (Page, 1995) are the strategic units for such baseline stabilization.

Individual teachers need to have at least a rudiment of trust in the enforcement capacity of the leadership and in the commitment of a sizable number of colleagues at the site. Trust in leadership and colleagues will decrease their fear of "free riders" in the organization, a phenomenon that Olson (1965) identified as detrimental to all collective action. Olson argues that individuals, as rational reward-maximizing actors, will not commit to an organization if their action does not have an immediate benefit for them and if they can hope to obtain desired goods without exerting individual effort. Free-riding, for example, may occur when a middle school's performance is measured based on eighth-graders' test performance. If student mobility is high, seventh grade teachers may be able to benefit from eighth grade teachers' efforts without increasing their own performance.

Two organizational responses could overcome the free rider problem. One response is increased collegiality, a hope that advocates of group accountability nurture.

In this case, teachers and administrators depart from norms of autonomy and assumptions of individual performance and develop collective responsibility for performance, sharing the burden of performance pressures. Another response to the free rider problem is that site leadership visibly enforces individual performance standards assuring faculty members of the containment of free-riding. In the second case, group accountability leads to a strengthening of hierarchy and compliance with, rather than internalization of, external standards. Therefore, capable and determined leadership or strong collegiality are preconditions for group accountability to work. The degree to which individuals perceive the presence of these two factors in their schools will be decisive in their assessment of organizational capacity which, in turn, may affect their expectations of success and their willingness to exert effort and become involved in school improvement.

Besides the uncertain role of individual work effort, group accountability in schools poses another challenge to (the perception of) organizational capacity and work motivation. In order to increase the performance of their organizations, managers of organizational renewal are faced with the key problem, according to Schein (1991), of retaining high-performing employees and raising performance levels of low performers or separating from them. In private industry, obvious instruments to achieve this are pay, promotion, and dismissal. According to Schein (1991), the management of an organization can increase authority and recognition for high-performing individuals making it harder for these employees to leave. Moreover, in expectancy models of motivation, motivation does not only depend on actual rewards received, but also on the level of rewards the employee perceives to deserve based on the performance of a "comparison other." Hence, for higher-performing employees to remain satisfied and thus committed to the organization, their "perceived equitable reward level" (Lawler, 1973, p. 83) needs to be higher.

It has traditionally been difficult for schools to reward high-performing employees differentially (Odden & Kelly, 1997). In fact, the earlier cited literature on career ladders found a strong commitment to egalitarian norms. But probation enters a new element into this situation. Now the blanket declaration of a whole school as failure and the threat for all employees to be subjected to sanctions, regardless of perceived performance levels, may communicate to high-performing teachers not only that their higher performance is not recognized by the accountability agency, but also that good performance does not count if it is carried out in association with lower-performing colleagues or in exacerbating social circumstances. Thus, one could expect higher-performing teachers to be particularly dissatisfied about this method of performance assessment, the very teacher cadres that need to be retained and mobilized for organizational renewal. Unless high-performing teachers are optimistic about their school's ultimate success, that is, they have high expectations of success, probation may in the long run only increase the flight of better qualified teachers to schools or districts with more job security or workplace stability (Darling-Hammond, 1994; 1997). Alternatively, the commitment of high-performing teachers to their school may offset exit tendencies despite teachers' doubts, but the source of this commitment would not be rational reward-maximizing calculation, but an ingrained collective work orientation, the expectation of psychic rewards, commitment to students and colleagues, and perhaps idealism. If this is the case, then probation designs that build on high pressure may have a detrimental effect while designs that emphasize probation as a wake-up signal and symbol of public concern may more easily tap into these kinds of commitments.

Pressure, Meaning, and Capacity

Our goal in this section is to formulate a parsimonious analytical model that can guide our inquiry into the response of educators to probation. The goal of such an inquiry is not a veracity test for various aforementioned theoretical models, but the understanding and interpretation of educators' responses in light of a set of heuristic categories. We have reviewed coercion, compliance, reward, meaning, and work group relationships as potential motivational dynamics that may theoretically underlie motivational effects of probation and we have related these dynamics to corresponding design emphases of a probation policy. We identified threat, stigma, scrutiny, warning, and signaling support as design emphases that are composed out of specific constellations of standards, sanctions, process controls, and resources as the main policy levers of accountability systems. Our primary aim here is the description and interpretation of responses unfolding as a result of probation in schools. But such description and interpretation should enable us to branch out into making inferences in two directions: inferences about the effectiveness of policy designs and inferences about the appropriateness of various motivational models that underlie the construction of probation policy designs as theories of action.

To this end, we condense the variety of motivational dynamics and design emphases under the categories of pressures, meanings, and capacities. These three categories simplify our task, ease parsimonious interpretation, and facilitate inferences about policies and motivational models. Pressures, meanings, and capacities interrelate with each other to mold educators' responses to probation. We hypothesize that the relative strength or weakness of pressures, meanings and capacities pushes responses in distinct directions, with strong repercussions for the fate of school improvement under the condition of probation. We subsume under external *pressure* the coercive elements of probation, the authoritative character of public policy as legitimate rule making, and the directive elements of accountability systems as well as aspects of mild motivational pressure, such as stigma and scrutiny that raise educators' concern for professional status and compel them to value raising test scores for the attainment of mainly extrinsic rewards, such as the repair of professional recognition or publicly recognized mastery. We subsume under educational *meaning* motivational patterns that point to goal internalization. External performance standards are internalized as personal goals when they are reflective of teachers' own values and standards of self-evaluation and when they are perceived to be in the relevant realm of student needs and proficiencies. The accountability system has meaning when teachers act out of concern for the quality of education they dispense to students and when the reward of mastery and accomplishment of goals is tied to the work itself. Under the category of capacity we subsume teachers' perception of their own individual skills and competencies as well as the skills of the group and the strength of social relationships within the organization. The perceived strength of social relationships at the workplace (leadership, collegiality) is a social source of work motivation in its own right, but, like individual capacity, also factors into expectations of reward under conditions of group accountability. Resources provided by external agencies complement existing individual and organizational capacities. Together, all three forms of capacity structure teachers' interpretation of the signal of probation, expectations of personal accomplishment and reward, and finally their ability to actually achieve results.

The latter is somewhat outside of the scope of our study. This study concentrates on performance motivation and commitment, that is, the effectiveness of probation in mobilizing educators to increase work effort and engage in school and instructional improvement. Whether educators are actually able to translate higher work motivation into higher performance depends on their individual and collective abilities as well as organizational processes that constrain or expand the margin of improvement. While our data contain perceptions of capacity and observational data on teachers' performance as reflective instructors, we do not have objective measures of ability in this study, save low-inference data on work experience. We do, however, study organizational processes in more detail, but here again we focus on the motivational impetus of organizational processes and on what schools actually do, rather than what they accomplish.

Induced Crisis and Organizational Learning

In the aforementioned literature on high performance organizations the group as accountability unit is usually understood as the basis for rewards or bonuses for good performance rather than as the unit that may have to absorb sanctions and penalties. The response of work units to sanctions, perhaps involving high personal stakes, may flow from individual and organizational processes that are quite different from those at work in high-performance or high-involvement organizations. Responses to sanctions may be more adequately captured by a line of inquiry that places the failing organization and its crisis in the center.

According to some theories of organizational decline (Meyer & Zucker, 1989), organizations decline when they have lost sight of their primary objective, such as profit-making in the private sector or the efficient delivery of a service in the public sector, but are kept alive by powerful groups that derive benefits from the mere existence of the organization. Interest groups, such as employees, governments, or community groups, divert the organization towards other goals, such as job security or easing public pressure. When this happens, the theory says, the organization is left to decline, but will nevertheless be maintained. In this situation, arresting the decline requires a strong and dramatic signal from management or external forces that throws the organization into crisis until it has resumed to heed its primary objective. In applying this model to failing or persistently declining schools, external agencies induce crisis and threaten the existence of the faculty or the organization in order to redirect the effort of leadership and employees towards student learning and achievement.

Induced crisis can motivate an organization to learn. Leithwood and Aitken define learning organizations as: "A group of people pursuing common purposes (and individual purposes as well) with a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those purposes, modifying them when that makes sense, and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes. (Leithwood & Aitken cit.

in Leithwood & Louis, 1998, p. 2). Hanushek (1994), constructing a connection between high-stakes accountability systems and the development of schools as learning organizations, assume that schools become learning organizations when stringent external performance goals make many bureaucratic regulations superfluous and schools are free to search for the most appropriate means to reach their goals.

When schools become learning organizations, a quest for personal mastery, team learning, common purpose, self-evaluation, system thinking, and strategizing pervades school life (Fullan, 1993; Senge, 1990). "A learning organization does not change because of directives from above, or because of alterations in the political or social environment. Rather, change and improvement occur because the individuals and the groups inside the school are able to acquire, analyze, understand and plan around information that arises from the environment and from internal monitoring" (Louis & Kruse, 1998, p. 18). Schools learn from their status of probation when they engage in a process of internalizing performance standards of the accountability system. At minimum, this process entails dialog about the goals of the accountability system and a collective commitment to them.

As probation throws schools into crisis, they unfreeze. Old routines and mental models are up for internal debate and conflict may arise. A conflict-driven scenario of organizational learning is narrated by Bennett and Ferlie (1994): "A crisis moves awkward issues up agendas...We are likely to see continuing pressure from pioneers, the formation of special groups that seek to evangelize the rest of the organization, high energy and commitment levels and a period of organizational plasticity" (p.11). In the case of schools, dynamic principals and groups of highly involved teachers inside the organization, or community pressure groups and change agents external to the organization could provide the ferment in the micro-politics of the school site. One should probably conceive of this kind of organizational learning as a political act involving the redistribution of power at the site (Ball, 1990), rather than as an administrative procedure or managerial project. For internal forces to unfreeze, it is crucial that the threat not be too great, yet that *crisis* is clearly orchestrated (Bennett & Ferlie, 1994, p. 112). The initiative should move to high-performing and highly motivated, perhaps even maverick, groups of teachers and administrators without overwhelming low performers with anxiety.

External threat and induced crisis, however, are not automatic triggers of learning (Levine, Rubin, & Wolohojian, 1982). According to Staw's threat-rigidity model (Staw, Lance & Dutton, 1981), threats can influence performance in two ways: they can induce performance decrement or increment. Individuals facing threat from the environment develop anxiety and stress leading to restriction in information processing, reliance on well-learned behavior, and increases in drive and energy. If the dominant behavior patterns of the individual are appropriate to the situation, performance increment occurs, according to this model; if they are inappropriate, performance decrement occurs.

A review of studies on group behavior suggests a similarly binary response. Staw et al. (1981) suggest that two organizational responses to threat are likely. If the group believes in the likelihood of success in meeting the new demand from the environment, increased cohesiveness, support for leadership, but also a tendency to uniformity occurs.

If the group believes in the likelihood of failure, cohesiveness decreases, leadership becomes unstable, and dissension arises (Staw, Lance & Dutton, 1981, p. 510). The organization is then unable to turn itself around, and often leadership is replaced or personnel exits. In this case, probation would have failed. Again, as in the case of individual responses, if skills to manage the crisis of the organization are not present, sanctions become counterproductive. But even organizations successfully responding to new stressful external demands tend to reinforce dominant patterns of operation, rather than learn new things, according to this model. Thus, threat and external pressure may foreclose avenues of increased organizational learning and in turn make internalization of external accountability demands an unlikely outcome of probation. Newmann, King & Rigdon (1997) make this point when they observe that in their sample of restructuring schools, strong external accountability pressures were a detriment to the development and maintenance of internal accountability processes. An older British study on accountability, as well, found that "the more hierarchical the school organisation the less individual teachers will feel either accountable to each other, or collectively to client groups" (Elliott et al., 1981).

In summary, to the degree that probation is perceived as a crisis of the organization, schools could respond in several ways. Schools could try to master the crisis by engaging in organizational learning, or learning could be blocked. In schools that respond to probation with organizational learning, we would find teachers proactively and voluntarily involved in professional development and individual and team learning. We would encounter dialog between staff and administration around performance goals and strategies. We would detect an awareness of educators' contribution to the schools' performance problems, and we would see at least some improvement strategies developed from unique site needs and tailored to site and individual classroom conditions. Alternatively, the organization may rigidify its operations and try to master the crisis by falling back on well-established routines. If these routines measure up to the performance challenge, the organization will weather the crisis successfully; if not, it may disintegrate instead. In a rigidified organization, traditional hierarchies become reinforced. Conformity and obeisance prevail over dialog. Dissension and conflict is suppressed. Strategies follow the logic of managerial initiative and external compliance. When we investigate schools' social interactions and chosen strategies as responses to probation, patterns of organizational learning and organizational rigidity serve as opposite ends of a heuristic continuum. Positively formulated, organizational learning may foster and reinforce the meaningfulness of accountability systems for individual educators while rigidity may be associated with a more effective response to external pressure.

Probation and Patterns of Planning

We investigate these questions further and for a larger number of schools with the help of a content analysis of school improvement plans. The way schools plan, captured in this study through an examination of the content of school improvement plans as well as the process of compiling the plans, may be a good indicator of whether schools respond to probation by lingering in a pattern of ineffectiveness, by fulfilling external obligation with internal managerialism, or by internalizing accountability. These three patterns serve as the basis for interpreting our findings.

The literature on school reform is replete with accounts of school improvement failures (Sarason, 1990). Embedded in highly contested political environments, schools answer to conflicting and often contradictory demands, and their external legitimacy is precarious (Wirt & Kirst, 1992). As a result, schools lose sight of student learning as their primary goal; they suffer from change overload (Fullan, 1991). Their operations are often fragmented and incoherent (Fuhrman, 1993). Schools shield core instructional routines from external scrutiny and react to demands for change with symbolic action and ritual compliance (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Meyer & Rowan, 1978). Reforms result in incremental add-ons to existing services rather than evaluation of past practices or transformation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

School improvement plans produced with this pattern of ineffectiveness have been found to be unrealistically comprehensive and full of minutiae rather than being focused and strategic (Broadhead, Cuckle, Hodgson & Dunford, 1996; Levine & Leibert, 1987). Planning efforts document grand visions and routine tasks (Conley, 1992; Conley,1993) or become occasions for conversations about day-to-day operations (Clark & McCarthy, 1983; Wallace, 1994). In Conley's (1993) study of strategic plans, the philosophy and mission of the plans were an eclectic assortment of tenets that reflected the "conventional wisdom" of the time. Goals and objectives tended to be vague or marginally realistic; strategies were numerous and activities incrementalist; the instructional core was not the primary focus of planning; and action plans were not innovative or original (p.23). The plans largely symbolized educators' public posture. Internal school faculty participation in writing and implementing the plan was often limited (Biott, Easen & Atkins, 1994).

School improvement efforts under the auspices of effective schools research aim at eliminating this ineffective pattern. Planning, a key ingredient of the school improvement process in effective schools, makes school improvement a more rational process. According to Lezotte and Bancroft (1985), school improvement begins with educators' motives for creating a high quality education that serves all children. Improvement efforts are research-based, that is, program designers use research knowledge on current best practice. Improvement is data driven, that is, needs are derived from measurable and observable evidence. Data are disaggregated for various student groups and skills, strategies concentrate on teaching and learning, and success is measured in terms of student outcomes. Student learning and behavior goals are agreed upon by the school, and progress towards goals is evaluated through frequent monitoring of student learning. The school engages in a process of organizational planning and development, informed by the belief that improvement is possible without a large infusion of resources or personnel. In this way, school improvement becomes a more rational process. Rational models of organizational improvement have gained impetus in recent systemic reform efforts. Systemic school accountability systems align system goals with school organizational goals and create coherence between incentives and instructional programs (O'Day & Smith, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991). Clear and authoritative performance goals provide the external impetus for schools to focus on student achievement and to adjust their own expectations of students to the high expectations of the accountability agency. Consensus on goals and standards, a prerequisite of effective school improvement processes, is more easily attained when school improvement is embedded in an external accountability system.

The presumed press of accountability systems towards rationalizing school operations by means of external control may result in a pattern of top-down managerialism. Characteristically, schools tend to cope (Louis & Miles, 1992) rather than respond proactively to externally induced regulations or innovations. Even when schools fulfill external obligations to authoritative accountability agencies whose demands are backed by sanctions for noncompliance, they may respond superficially (Firestone et al., 1997; Wong, Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 1998). Tucker and Codding (1998), advocates of standards-based reform, recognized this when they said, "[R]elying on standards alone to change student performance is tantamount to believing that a more sophisticated measure of student failure will by itself turn failure into success. It will not" (p. 21). As a remedy, they stressed the importance of working on school vision and school culture. As we saw earlier, external accountability carried out by way of rigorous performance testing may actually have a detrimental effect on internal development processes (Newmann et al., 1997).

Planning does not come naturally to schools (Broadhead et al., 1996; Hutchinson, 1993). As a result, planning efforts are frequently introduced from the outside, usually from the top of the system (Conley, 1992; Clark & McCarthy, 1983). Entering into schools from the top, it is not surprising that the principal and her functionaries are a key presence and force in schools' planning efforts (Broadhead et al., 1996; Constable, 1994; Canner, 1985), though principals are rarely involved in planning alone (Broadhead et al., 1996, p. 283). However, broad teacher participation in planning is not common (Biott, Easen & Atkins, 1994). Though feeling committed themselves, often times planning committees have doubts about the commitment of non-committee members to the process (Canner, 1985; Biott, Easen & Atkins, 1994). Educators tend to comply with planning mandates, but resistance among them against control through rational management systems can be great (Rowan, 1986). Thus, planners tend to operate from a precarious internal base.

A school responding to external performance obligations with a managerial model of school improvement may characteristically align its goals to the standards of the accountability system. Goals, therefore, are clear and focused on student achievement. The improvement plan uses the system's quantitative diagnostics (e.g., performance tests, required school surveys). Activities center on curriculum and instruction, and professional development is viewed as training of new skills primarily in that area. Responsibilities for tasks are clearly assigned, but administrators and specialists on top of the organizational hierarchy carry a large burden. In the spirit of accountability, demands for new resources as well as attention to teachers' work satisfaction and motivation are de-emphasized. School improvement plans are relevant as public statements of the organization and as management tools for administration and specialist teachers to leverage teacher compliance with leaders' or administrators' strategies.

McDonald (1996), summarizing his experience with change processes in schools affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools, warned against a view of school change as leveraged. The alternative he described is a view of change as relational whereby faculties become involved in an ongoing reflective conversation on the school's purposes, students, and standards. Standards involve the whole school as a community. They are formulated in a dialogue with students and parents about the necessary steps to achieve these standards. The core source of this conversation is the moral empathy of adults towards the children they have chosen to educate (Meier, 1995). Real standards "have to be constructed on-site." They can be externally formulated, but they have to be substantiated "by the light of the actual performance of students" (McDonald, 1996, p. 151). In other words they must be internalized. Change, in this view, is internalized and communitarian rather than externally induced and managerial.

A great number of studies and theoretical works have shown the importance of internal development if schools are to tackle ingrained cultural regularities and become places of innovation (Little, 1982; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Sarason, 1990; Nias, Southworth & Campbell, 1992; Barth, 1990). In planning for change, the act of internalization can be dramatic, as this account illustrates: "As one SIP [School Improvement Project] principal expressed it, joining SIP is like joining Alcoholics Anonymous: first the school must realize it needs to improve, then it must willingly plunge in and help itself" (Clark & McCarthy, 1983, p. 20). In the absence of internalization, schools unproductively spin their wheels. In Levine and Leibert's (1987) account of planning, teachers and administrators are bogged down in an overload of activities, reporting, and paperwork. Planning "produces little more than scurrying about to provide 'evidence' that the school staff is in compliance with the planning guidelines" (p. 399; see also Bardach, 1986). Rather than enhancing the rationality of the organization, school improvement planning may actually foster "hyperrationalization" (Wise, 1977; Fullan, 1991).

The problem of internalizing external performance demands has often been addressed with specific design features in accountability systems, such as the role of a liaison who forges a bridge between school conditions and external expectations. In a system described by Cuttance (1994), instances of external review of performance goals alternate with instances of internal review of school development. In our study, the state of Kentucky created the role of the "Distinguished Educator" who was to be a representative of the state and an internal change agent simultaneously while the Maryland system lacks such an explicit bridging feature that could facilitate internalization.

School improvement as an internalized process under conditions of external accountability may be associated with a number of characteristics in school improvement plans. School goals reflect the standards of the accountability system, but these will be interpreted in light of student work. The plan addresses how the school will get from the present situation of probation to lofty external standards. Needs analysis combines diagnostics based on externally generated data with internal school knowledge. Analysis of causes for shortcomings focuses on those aspects of the situation that can be internally attributed and therefore influenced by educators at the school. The school's philosophy expresses the faculty's reflection on core beliefs and culture and speaks to the unique conditions of the school. Professional development consists of ongoing activities that accompany a revamping of instruction and student-teacher relationships. The work of classroom teachers is evaluated directly, and work commitment is a central concern. Classroom teachers as much as the administration take responsibility for activities.

We presume that a successful accountability system does two things. It provides external standards and mandates of effective management which schools can accept as obligations. Practitioners must internalize these obligations, that is, they make sense to practitioners and give occasion to goal formation in light of site conditions, critical reflection, self-evaluation, focus, and fresh commitment, leading to a culture of new possibilities for student achievement and teacher performance (Barth, 1990; Deal & Peterson, 1999). Thus, in persistently low-performing schools, both external challenge and internal disposition, managerial elements exerting control and communitarian elements inducing commitment, may be required. It is the putative strength of accountability systems to move ineffective schools to a higher level of effectiveness. If standards, sanctions, and managerial mandates of the accountability system had no effect on low-performing schools, these schools, more likely than not, would exhibit a pattern of ineffectiveness, as described above. But school improvement mandates, first and foremost, present themselves as external demands to which targeted schools may answer with a pattern of external obligation to managerial mandates coupled with internal managerialism. Lastly, a pattern of internalized change may develop as schools translate external demands into internal goals and strategies. In our data analysis we search for indications of these patterns. Though these patterns may appear in pure form, the strength of specific characteristics enables us to infer the kind of change process high-stakes accountability occasions in schools on probation.

Internalization and Instructional Change

Internalization processes involving organizational and individual learning are key in accountability systems that combine the aim for a higher intensity of teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 1994, chp. 6) with a press for a different pedagogy (Knapp, 1997; Firestone, 1996). In either of the two accountability systems studied here, schools, in order to master probation successfully, not only need to compel students to work harder, but also learn differently. Higher work intensity, tighter lesson plans, but also higher-order thinking, teamwork, verbalization, metacognition, deliberation, and reflective writing are paramount. Thus, these accountability systems aim at classroom discourse, a level of practice that is hard to reach by policies. Spillane and Jennings (1997) show that when districts employed alignment strategies to change instructional practice, they often achieved superficial task modification, but did not reach more deeply ingrained task and discourse structures. For these to be changed, teacher learning is key.

The literature on teacher learning and knowledge (Shulman, 1987) shows that what teachers learn from policy depends on a host of factors: their extant practices, their understanding and interpretation of the policy, their own experiences, dispositions and skills, and the support they receive in efforts to change their practices (Cohen, McLaughlin, and Talbert, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Grant, 1998). Grant's (1998) study of Michigan teachers attempting to incorporate instructional reforms found that teachers responded quite differently to the same reform, even though they were exposed to similar information about the intent of the reform and were given common direction on the use of instructional materials that were adopted by their school districts. Teachers often do not see how policy demands for complex instructional change challenge their past practices and, therefore, do not see a need to learn new methods or change extant practices. Rather, they trivialize complex tasks to simpler task demands (Cohen, 1990; Spillane & Jennings, 1997).

Teachers weigh performance standards and institutional demands against the perceived needs of their students. When demands are ambitious and gaps are perceived as wide, teachers are more likely to question the relevance of standards for their students (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). Often, teachers cannot learn from the gap between high external performance demands and their level of instruction. Perceived student needs exert strong pressures on teachers to adapt instruction to a level "that works" with *their* students. Teachers in low-performing schools often hold low expectations for their students. Authoritative demands and adaptive pressures emanating from perceived student reality tend to be juxtaposed; client needs and institutional demands are both accepted in their legitimacy, and conflicts between them are left largely unexamined (Mintrop, 1999).

When probation, as is often the case, is accompanied by process controls, administrators monitor teachers with added paper work, increased record keeping, and standardizing surface routines that stage compliance, but often diminish time for lesson preparation and professional collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Cohen & Ball, 1999). If teachers are to learn to implement teaching practices aligned to ambitious reforms, teachers need to time to plan, study, and struggle with new ideas. They need to have the opportunity to learn from other professionals whom they can observe and with whom they can collaborate (Ball & Rundquist, 1993). If teachers learn ambitious pedagogy through "revisiting and reinventing" (Cohen & Ball, 1990), then probation cannot succeed without accountability being connected to personal educational meanings and processes of organizational learning that facilitate exploring these meanings.

3. The Study

We approach the phenomenon of probation with three sets of data: case study data for eleven schools, statewide test scores, and school improvement plans written by a large portion of the states' schools on probation. Quantitative state performance data give us some indication of performance trends and performance differentials between schools on probation and the state as a whole. Since the state of Kentucky discontinued the use of the KIRIS test as an assessment instrument in favor of the CATS[3] test during the time of the study, this kind of analysis could only be carried out for the state of Maryland. Content analysis of school improvement plans from a larger portion of schools on probation in either state will give us an overview of the schools' vision of school improvement, interpretation of the problem, and solutions proposed. At the heart of the study are case studies of schools on probation. In developing the case studies, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. We used interviews, classroom observations, meeting observations, and survey questionnaires to gain a picture of what was going on in these schools as a result of probation.

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[3] Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System

Case Selection

Findings for the study are based on eleven schools in two states, Maryland and Kentucky. Our study investigates the role of probation in urban schools and those that have similar characteristics. Hence all eleven schools serve student populations with high proportions of children from poverty and minority backgrounds. Data collection took place between the spring of 1998 and the spring of 2000. The eleven schools were put on probation by their respective state department of education for underperformance according to the criteria of their respective accountability system. We selected seven schools in Maryland and four schools in Kentucky. The Maryland schools were designated as "reconstitution-eligible," the Kentucky schools as "in decline," terms the states used for probation at that time. At the termination of the study, both states changed their terminology. "Reconstitution eligibility" commuted into "local reconstitution" and "in decline" became "non-reward" and "eligible for assistance." We had originally intended to select four schools from each jurisdiction. In Maryland, the four schools initially selected were all located in District A, the district on which the policy focused initially. When the Maryland State Department of Education moved with force into a second district with probation measures, we added three schools from that district.

Considering that between 1993 and 2000 there were about 100 schools on probation in Maryland and 280 in Kentucky, the evidentiary base of eleven cases is small. Nevertheless we made an effort to capture through our case selection some of the variegated characteristics and circumstances of schools on probation in the two states. The eleven schools were selected according to a number of criteria: district, school type, duration in the program, educational load, and performance history. In each state, about half of the selected schools are middle schools, half are elementary schools. We excluded high schools because at the time of the study Maryland did not have high school assessments in place, and probation affected primarily elementary and middle schools.

In Maryland, we conducted research in seven schools, three elementary and four middle schools. Four of the schools are located in District A, a large urban school district, three in District B, a suburban district with strongly urban characteristics. With the exception of two schools, all of Maryland's roughly one hundred reconstitution-eligible (RE) schools were located in these two districts during the study period. One elementary and one middle school were probation veterans when they entered the study. They had been identified in 1995, soon after high stakes accountability policies were enacted in the state. Four of the schools, part of a large cohort of 37 RE schools, were newly identified when data collection began in 1998.

Originally, we did not select schools based on their previous performance. Rather, we wanted to study the unfolding of probation, not knowing whether the schools would be successful in their improvement effort. The study is not designed to compare successful with unsuccessful schools. Instead its design aims at description and interpretation of processes and responses to probation in a cross-section of schools. As to the schools that had persisted in the program for years, we had little choice. We selected one elementary and one middle school that had been among the small batch of schools identified at the inception of the policy. It turned out that with the exception of one elementary school, our selected schools stagnated or made only small performance gains. This is not atypical for Maryland's reconstitution-eligible (RE) schools as a whole. In order to represent improving schools more strongly and to learn from their trajectories, we added a middle school to the selection in 1999, one that showed a decidedly positive performance record subsequent to RE status. The schools are described in detail in Part IV. Here, we limit ourselves to broad descriptors (see Table I.1). All seven schools are attended by at least 90 percent African American students. English language learners are not a prominent group in any of the schools. District administrators assisted us in selecting a cross-section of their district's schools on probation. Participation in the study was voluntary on the part of the schools. A number of schools declined to participate in the study or ignored requests for contact.

Table I.1 – The Seven Maryland Schools

	School A	**School B**	**School C**	**School D**	**School E**	**School F**	**School G**
School Type	Middle	Middle	Elementary	Middle	Elementary	Elementary	Middle
Enrollment (Sep. 1999)	796	631	498	1,222	388	409	633
Location	District B Inner suburban ring	District B Inner suburban ring	District B Inner suburban ring	District A Inner city	District A Inner city	District A Inner city	District A City's edge
Percent Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	FRL: 50%	FRL: 40%	FRL: 65%	FRL: 70%	FRL: 90%	FRL: 80%	FRL: 40-60%
Duration on Probation in 1998	Just identified	Just identified	Just identified	3 years	3 years	Just identified	Just identified

We conducted research in four schools in the state of Kentucky. Two of them are elementary schools and two middle schools. Two of the four schools had been in decline for two biennia, not necessarily consecutively, while the other two were "in decline" for the first time during the biennium during which we conducted the study. Our selection of two repeating and two newly identified schools is biased towards repeaters. Of the 53 schools that were "in decline" during the 1994-96 biennium, only 16 (slightly less than a third) repeated. While in Maryland, schools on probation were concentrated in two districts, in Kentucky "schools in decline" could be found across the whole expanse of the state. Our study tried to capture this geographic spread. We therefore selected schools from a city, a small town, and rural environment in different regions of the state. In line with our main inquiry into the role of probation in schools serving large numbers of at-risk students and in order to make the Kentucky schools more comparable to the Maryland schools, we selected schools in Kentucky with large proportions of students who qualify for the federal lunch program and with minority populations above the state average. Furthermore, while in Maryland all RE schools are very low performers in absolute terms, in Kentucky schools on all performance levels can fail to meet their growth target and are therefore in danger of probationary status. We included such a relatively high- performing school with insufficient growth in our selection.

Table I.2 – The Four Kentucky Schools

	School 10	**School 20**	**School 30**	**School 40**
School Type	Elementary	Middle	Elementary	Middle
Enrollment	460	760	580	900
Location	Small town	City	Small town	Large city

	School 10	**School 20**	**School 30**	**School 40**
Percent Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	92%	42%	82%	80%
Proportion of Minority Students	10%	36%	46%	47%
Duration on Probation	Two biennia	One biennium	One biennium	Two biennia

Three of the four schools in the study have populations that are much more diverse than schools in the state as a whole. Kentucky has an overall minority population of 11 percent. One elementary school is consistent with the state average at 10 percent minority enrollment. However, the other elementary and both of the middle schools have minority populations of nearly 40 percent. In each case, the predominant minority is African American. In addition, the schools also serve much greater numbers of students in poverty, as indicated by the percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Statewide, 46 percent of students participate in the program. However, in the two middle schools, the number of students participating hovers around 80 percent, and in the other elementary school, the number consistently approaches 90 percent

Case Study Data

Each school was visited numerous times by at least two researchers over a two-year period from 1998 to 2000. The database for each Maryland case consists of a survey, a minimum of twenty-one formal, semi-structured interviews, and many more informal ones as well as six classroom observations per school. Interviewees were teachers of all subjects, administrators, instructional specialists, and other resource teachers. All principals were interviewed. We also interviewed district officials who were responsible for programs in schools on probation, as well as state officials, state monitors, and district support personnel. At least four meetings at each school were formally observed. In many cases the researchers participated in a number of additional meetings. The case studies of Kentucky schools are based on fifteen to twenty formal interviews per school, as well as multiple informal interviews with teachers, principals, district, and state personnel. At least two researchers visited each school several times during a two-year period. Additionally, the researchers observed a minimum of five lessons, followed by debriefings. The same survey instrument was administered.

For the interviews, two different protocols were used (see appendix). One protocol focused on the affective reaction to probation and the effect of probation on work motivation and commitment, the other on work site conditions and change strategies for school and classroom. The interviews lasted 45 to 50 minutes. Almost all of the formal interviews were transcribed and coded with the help of NUDIST, a computer program that assists the researcher in data management and theory building. The original coding followed the interview protocol (see appendix). In subsequent coding iterations new codes were developed. A separate protocol and coding scheme was used for interviews with high-level administrators and politicians.

Our objective in observing meetings was to inquire about the occurrence of discussion, debate, pressure, or dissent in the interaction of teachers with each other and with their administrators, particularly when the staff dealt with issues of accountability. Observers wrote up descriptions of meetings following a set of questions (see appendix).

We conducted lesson observations and debriefing interviews following the lessons. The lesson observations served to explore how teachers teach, the debriefing interviews show us how the observed teachers reflect on their teaching and how they make sense of accountability and probation as it directly relates to their teaching.

During the observations we noted the topic of the lesson and its main activities. We listed main questions and discernible objectives as far as they were identifiable by the observers. Of particular interest was the teacher's ability to deliver a coherent lesson that focused on a main question or objective and that grouped activities around those questions or objectives. We examined the conceptual level of the lesson, materials used during the lesson, and forms of interaction employed. We noted if a lesson contained activities that we could recognize as specifically targeting test-taking skills.

At the level of classroom climate, we rated the general tone of the teacher's communication with students. To gain a sense of the teacher's effectiveness, we examined to what degree students were disciplined and on task. But equally as important was the teacher's use of strategies to motivate students for the content of the lesson. Considering the pressure on teachers for content coverage and drill, induced by accountability systems, student motivation was a particularly important aspect of the lesson. Finally, we described the layout of the classroom paying attention to seating arrangements and displays of student work and test-related items.

In line with the ambitious goals of the performance-based accountability system, we distinguished lessons according to two levels: basic and elaborate. A high quality basic lesson is conceptually coherent, i.e. it is organized around a central question or topic. Activities are related to this conceptual core. Materials and forms of interaction vary in order to stimulate student participation. The conceptual level of activities centers on factual recall, comprehension, and practice. Teachers lecture or engage students in recitation style dialogue or silent seatwork. In sum, good lessons on the basic level are coherent, vary material and forms of interaction, stress simple content or cognitive skills, and employ teacher-centered forms of dialogue that engage students willing to learn.

While we did not take for granted that such lessons were common place among teachers in the schools on probation, we bore in mind that for schools to be successful in either state's performance-based assessment system, lessons had to be of high quality on a more elaborate level. They needed to surpass the basic level by including opportunities for students to apply knowledge, generalize from examples, deliberate ideas, solve problems, evaluate answers, and reflect on process. During such lessons students may work together in groups or with partners independent of the teacher and engage in more complex forms of dialogue with fellow students and the teacher that go beyond direct question-answer exchanges.

Usually two raters observed lessons with the help of an observation instrument. While observing the lesson, the two observers did two things: they noted the sequential flow of the lesson structured by main activities, materials, and forms of interaction; and they took "snapshots" in regular intervals five times during the lesson. During these snapshots observers described what they saw according to the criteria defined above (i.e. activity, content, material, form of interaction, tone, motivation, time on task). After the lesson, the raters compared their notes. We did without a strict inter-rater reliability test, partly because of the qualitative nature of the data and partly because some of the lessons were observed by only one researcher due to scheduling difficulties and resource constraints. The lesson observation concluded with a summary rating sheet on which the observers quantified the number of snapshots during which they were able to observe specific lesson characteristics. Observers filled out the rating sheets independently of each other and subsequently came to agreements when differences in the ratings occurred. Hence, the ratings provide us with a rough quantitative description of content, methods, and climate of the observed lessons. The observation instrument asked for summary judgments about time on task and classroom climate. The data in these areas are therefore rather impressionistic. This was sufficient for the purpose of this study. The classroom observations were only one data point among others. They served to stimulate conversations with teachers and they gave us a rough picture of what kind of teaching was going on in these schools on probation.

Immediately after the lesson, whenever possible, we conducted debriefing interviews. We asked teachers how typical the observed lesson was for their teaching style and what they intended to accomplish during the lesson. Then teachers were to summarize the lesson and to analyze it with respect to its successes and shortcomings. If the teacher felt the lesson was successful and he or she would teach it again the same way and if we observed what we considered shortcomings we would probe into differences between the teacher's and observer's perspectives. While we were not concerned about who was "right," we were interested to learn how the teacher would engage in an analytic conversation with an outside observer about his or her lesson. In a next step, we examined the teacher's view of the lesson's adequacy in meeting the performance goals of the accountability system. We paid particular attention to the way teachers cope with the gap between student reality and institutional expectations. Finally, we inquired about conditions that helped or hindered teachers in being effective instructors, with special attention paid to those new elements that probation may have brought into the school. The debriefing interviews were transcribed and coded with the help of NUDIST (see codes in appendix).

We conducted about 50 lesson observations in the Maryland schools and 20 in the Kentucky schools. We dropped from our analysis lessons for which we could not complete the full sequence of observation and debriefing. Likewise, some observation files were incomplete. For this report, we used the data from 45 lessons, 30 from Maryland and 15 from Kentucky. We asked principals to give us a list of outstanding and marginal teachers and hoped to select a cross-section of talents, subject matter areas, and age groups for the observations. This was not always possible. Many teachers, sensitive to a stream of outsiders in their classrooms, declined to participate. In some instances, the principal's recommendations were questionable. Nevertheless, the 45 lessons analyzed in this report give us a fairly wide spectrum of performances, subjects, grades, and age groups. Among the 30 lessons from Maryland, we observed eight eighth grade classrooms, three seventh grade, two sixth grade, five multi-grade middle school classrooms, six primary (grades K-2) and six elementary (grades 3-5) classrooms. Subject areas included language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and health.

The teacher questionnaire, containing 250 items, was subdivided into seven major components: demographics, teacher quality, work satisfaction, job commitment, views of the accountability system, affective responses to probation, perceived effects of probation, information on the schools' professional culture, and finally teachers' priorities and suggestions for improvement. We relied on our own interview material for items that related to accountability and probation. Specifically, recurring phrases in the interviews, for example: "It's time to shape up," or: "We will prove we are better than we look," were utilized for item formulation. We were careful to formulate items that were acceptable and palatable to respondents who found themselves in a defensive situation. In constructing the questionnaire, we also consulted the work by Kelley and Protsik (1997) on teacher motivation, LeCompte and Dworkin, (1991) on burn-out, Ashton and Webb (1986) on teacher efficacy, and McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) on school culture.

The 250-item questionnaire was administered to all full-time teachers and administrators at the eleven sites. Substitutes and teachers' aides were excluded, likewise teachers on leave. In Maryland, the survey was conducted on site, in Kentucky by mail. Participation was voluntary in all cases, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Overall response rate to the survey was 53 percent, though response rates vary by school. Response rates for some schools are not as high as we had hoped. According to conversations with teachers, one explanation for their halting response to the questionnaire was the contentious nature of the topic and the defensive posture of teachers who often felt treated unfairly, besieged by so many new external requirements and inundated by outsiders analyzing their putative shortcomings. Given the sensitivity of the topic, we shied away from using the authority of the principal to "round up" questionnaires. In our study, findings from the survey data stand together with qualitative data from interviews, meetings, and classroom observations. Combining quantitative and qualitative data sources will enhance the robustness of our findings. Across the two states and eleven schools, a total of 287 respondents returned valid questionnaires. Our statistical analysis is based on these responses.

Table I.3 - Survey Response Rates Across the Eleven Schools on Probation

Maryland			Kentucky		
Schools			Schools		
	A	66%		10	50%
	B	75%		20	46%
	C	29%		30	49%
	D	53%		40	44%
	E	93%			
	F	81%			
	G	49%			
Average		58%	Average		47%

Overall 53%

We briefly describe characteristics of respondents who returned valid questionnaires. They are characterized by gender, race, age, and role in the school. Respondents from both Maryland and Kentucky are overwhelmingly female. Only 21 percent of respondents in Maryland, and 16 percent in Kentucky are male. The distribution of race and ethnicity reflects differences between the two states. In Maryland, most schools on probation are located in districts that are predominantly African American. Many teachers in these two districts come from the same ethnic community as the students. Hence, in our sample from Maryland, 77 percent of the respondents are African American while 22 percent are white. In Kentucky, this proportion is reversed: reflecting the ethnic make up of the schools, 89 percent are white while the proportion of African American teachers is only 11 percent. For our eleven-school sample as a whole, the proportion of white and black educators is almost even. Among the Kentucky respondents, the mean age of respondents is 42.5 years, among Maryland respondents it is 39 years. Teachers in the seven Maryland schools on probation are on the average younger than those in Kentucky.

We asked teachers and administrators whether they assumed a special role or function in their school related to school improvement. The questionnaire provided fifteen options and an open response box. A large number of respondents indicated that they fulfilled special roles at their schools. Some 38 percent occupy positions of leadership such as administrators, union representatives, master teachers, test coordinators, or committee chairs. If we include members of school improvement teams, writers of school improvement plans, and school improvement resource teachers, the proportion of teachers with leadership functions climbs to 43 percent. Overall, teachers with these special assignments are over-represented in our sample. Thus, when we interpret the findings from this survey, we need to bear in mind that responses may be skewed in favor of activist teachers. Presumably, the views of a sizable group of uninvolved teachers come less to the fore in the quantitative component of the study. Given our sample size and the purpose of the survey to augment qualitative data, we explore the data statistically with descriptive and bi-variate analyses.

School Improvement Plans

The content analysis of school improvement plans moves us beyond the eleven case study schools. It gives us an idea of how probation was dealt with in a larger number of schools. We read school improvement plans from Maryland and Kentucky schools on probation. In addition, we analyzed school improvement plans from a third jurisdiction, the city of San Francisco. That city's accountability system contrasted sharply from that of the two state systems. A comparison of school improvement plans from the three systems brought the potential effect of varying design features on schools' responses to probation into sharper focus.

Documentary analysis from Maryland is based on 46 school improvement plans that were compiled by "reconstitution-eligible" schools. The 46 schools, representing a little over half of all RE schools in 1998, were selected by balancing three criteria. The sample reflects the proportion of the reconstitution cohort, the distribution of school types (elementary, middle, high) in the universe of all RE schools, and the local jurisdictions involved. As was mentioned above, only elementary and middle schools are included.

Table I.4 - Maryland Sample Selection for School Improvement Plans by Cohort, Type, and Local Jurisdiction

Cohort	Total Number of Pans	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools
1995	3	1	2
1996	16	12	4
1997	9	6	3
1998	(Local A) 9	4	5
1998	(Local B) 9	6	3
Total	46	29	17

Kentucky plans were selected from the universe of schools enrolled in the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program according to the following criteria: by region, by status in the STAR program, by school type, and by planning template, adjusted to a sample of about forty plans. This resulted in a total of 37 plans, of which 32 are elementary and middle schools, the focus of our study. In Kentucky, school improvement planning underwent changes since the inception of KERA. Beginning in 1992, all schools on probation in Kentucky were required to complete an annual School Transformation Plan (STP) which outlined their needs, goals, and strategies for improvement during the coming year. In 1997, the Kentucky Department of Education redesigned the process of school improvement planning by "consolidating" the multiple plans needed for federal and state programs into one form to be completed every two years. This Consolidated Plan (CP) replaced the STP as the method of school planning throughout the state, and each school, not only those identified by the accountability system, were required to complete the process. Both systems of planning focused on instructional improvement and student achievement, but consolidated planning also serves as the school's funding application for numerous federal and state funds. Both types of plans were included in our content analysis.

Table I.5 - Kentucky Sample Selection for School Improvement Plans by Cohort, School Type, and Plan Type

Biennium	Total Number of Plans	Elementary Schools	Middle/Junior High Schools	High Schools
1996-1997 (STPs)	12	4	5	3
1998-2000 (CPs)	20	6	12	2
Total	32	9	17	5

For San Francisco, plans were read for all elementary and middle schools that were on probation in 1998, that is, those that were part of CSIP (Comprehensive School Improvement Project). This amounted to 20 out of a total of 24 CSIP schools. The sample includes sixteen elementary and four middle schools. The high school plans were not included for consistency among the three jurisdictions.

Thus, a total of 93 plans from the three jurisdictions were read, coded, and rated with the help of a codebook (see appendix). Our analysis is based on these 93 plans. The code domains followed the format of the plan: needs, causes, diagnostics, philosophy, goals, activities, resources, and responsibilities. Activities were subdivided into organizational, climate, parent and community, curriculum and instruction, and professional development activities. A separate activity sub-domain *teacher performance* specifically hones in on new requirements for teachers' work performance (e.g., lesson plans, evaluations, etc.). A data base manager (Microsoft Access) was used to structure the coding. In a second step entries were coded. For example, in the *cause domain*, causes were coded according to "internal" or "external" attribution of the addressed problem; in the *organizational activity* domain according to "new specialized service," or "whole school overhaul." In addition to these lists, readers were asked to rate activity entries with respect to priority, time frame, alignment, and responsibility. The coding concluded with a number of summary ratings with respect to the plan's focus, alignment, and consistency.

The plans were read independently by trained readers, two for each jurisdiction, who shared the reading load. A small number of plans were initially read by the whole research team. Agreement on codes and ratings was established. Coding reliability for the Maryland and Kentucky plans was established through the following procedure. Twenty of the 46 Maryland plans were read by two readers (i.e. 10 from each reader overlap). Reliability was checked in two ways: all plans read by one reader were compared with all read by the other (the two data sets overlap with 20 of the 46 plans); the plans that were read twice were matched and similarities were checked. For the Kentucky plans, 10 of the 37 plans were read twice. Ratings for these plans were compared. For San Francisco, five of the 20 plans were read twice and ratings were compared. Codings and ratings that were deemed unreliable (e.g., some of the summary ratings) were deleted from the analysis. We will only report on findings for which we could obtain agreement between the two raters within a margin of no more than plus or minus five points, as measured in counts of activities or estimated percentages.

In summary, we tackle the phenomenon of probation with the help of state test score data, interviews, observations, surveys, and content analysis of school improvement plans. This enables us to embed the eleven focal schools into statewide patterns present among schools on probation in the two states.

PART II. THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS OF MARYLAND AND KENTUCKY

Accountability systems differ widely with respect to standards (i.e. measurements, performance assessments, indicators), expectations (i.e. high performance ceilings, average performance, growth increments), incentives (i.e. rewards and sanctions, criteria for entry into and exit from probation), and interventions (i.e. oversight, regulation, assistance). For example, some accountability systems combine quantitative with qualitative performance measures and indicators, such as the city of San Francisco used to do (Goldstein et al., 1998), while some are purely quantitative. Some have very high goals, such as Virginia (Portner, 1999), while some peg their expectations to average student performance, such as Texas (Sandham, 2000). Some systems are tough on sanctions, such as the city of Chicago (Chicago Public Schools, 1997; Wong et al., 1997) while others emphasize support for teachers, such as New York (Ascher et al., 1997). Some identify rock-bottom performers as probationary schools, such as Maryland, while others target growth deficits on all performance levels, such as Kentucky (Guskey, 1994; Petrosko, 1996). These policy design differences will slant educators' responses to accountability and the imposition of sanctions (Elmore, Abelman & Fuhrman 1996). Thus, it is necessary to be specific about design features that structure the accountability environment for educators. In the following two sections we will describe the Maryland and Kentucky accountability systems with special attention paid to features that are relevant for schools on probation.

1. Maryland

The Maryland school accountability system has been in place since 1993 and, unlike systems in other jurisdictions, has been fairly stable over the last five years. The state created its own performance-based test (MSPAP = Maryland State Performance Assessment Program) that it administers to all elementary and middle schools. School accountability relies upon results from the MSPAP as well as yearly attendance rates. Middle schools are also judged on their performance on the Maryland Functional Tests (MFT). The evaluation of high school performance is based upon the Maryland Functional Tests (MFT), attendance rates and student dropout rates. The MSPAP is given in grades three, five and eight in reading, writing, language usage, mathematics, science, and social studies to measure student performance on tasks requiring critical thinking, problem solving and the integration of knowledge from multiple fields of study. Some notable features of the test are randomly selected groups of students that perform complex performance tasks and written explanations of problem solving processes that are scored with rubrics. The MFT measures basic competencies in reading, mathematics, writing, and citizenship (in high school); the tests are standardized multiple-choice tests and satisfactory performance by individual students is required for graduation.

Performance indicators are calculated as follows. Yearly attendance is measured as the percentage of students who were present in school for at least half of the day on an average school day during the September to June school year. Yearly dropout rate is the percentage of students in grades nine through twelve who withdrew from school before graduation or before completing a Maryland approved educational program during the school year. The School Performance Index (SPI) is used as a measure to determine the progress of a school's academic performance. The SPI is the weighted average of a school's distance from the level of "satisfactory" performance in the above listed areas. "Satisfactory" is a criterion-based standard established by the state. The index is generated on a yearly basis. The state has established a variety of performance targets that challenge some of the best schools in the state. In elementary and middle schools acceptable measures are a 94 percent attendance rate and the attainment of 70 percent of students at a school scoring at the satisfactory level on the MSPAP. Average MFT scores for middle schools must reach 95 percent in reading, 80 percent in math, and 90 percent in writing. Average MFT scores for high schools is set at 95 percent in reading, 80 percent in math, 90 percent in writing, 85 percent in citizenship, and an overall score of 90 percent. In addition high schools are asked to achieve a retention rate of 97 percent. The formula for calculating the SPI gives the most weight to the MSPAP. The MFT plays a relatively small role in determining the SPI for middle schools.

The Maryland State Department of Education uses the SPI to determine which schools will be subject to state intervention. The state created the status of probation, or "reconstitution eligibility" as it was called as of the year 2000, and the status of actual reconstitution, which is equivalent to state take-over in Maryland. Two conditions are necessary for probationary status: 1) the school's average performance must be far below the standard; and 2) the school's performance must have declined from previous performance levels (Maryland State Department of Education, 1997). The relative yearly progress of schools, either negative or positive, is used to determine potential probationary status. A change index is created subtracting the SPI for the current year from the average SPI of the two previous years.

If the current SPI is far below standard and declining (shown by a negative change index) the school is considered eligible for reconstitution. The state also reports the composite index (CI), consisting of scores in all MSPAP content areas. The number of schools designated as reconstitution eligible by the state is limited by the State Department of Education's capacity to provide assistance to low-performing schools. The state will not put every school that is eligible for reconstitution on probationary status. Thus the state superintendent retains much discretion in the identification process.

Schools placed on probation must submit a school improvement plan to the state superintendent. The school improvement plan is to be written according to a template to be completed and submitted by the school. The plan includes school history and demographics, declared school mission, priorities and goals, as well as specific steps to improve the school program, proposed technical support, and professional development. A budget must also be submitted indicating how money will be allocated to provide for the indicated improvements. The plan is subject to approval by the state board of education. The state provides school improvement grants for reconstitution eligible schools, but it is up to the districts to decide on the manner of disbursement. These grants are to be used solely for professional development and curricular improvements. Of the two districts studied here, one allocated these funds directly to schools, the other did likewise in the earlier years of the program's existence, but has subsequently folded these funds into the budget for schools with special needs. Schools that participated in the study received earmarked reconstitution funds between $0 to $150,000 yearly.

Review panels and state monitors visit the school to help in the diagnosis of needs and oversee implementation of the plan. The state monitors are the "eyes and ears" of the state; they do not fulfil the role of change agents in schools. Though often experienced educators or retired administrators, they have neither received extensive training for their role, nor do they have the time to get intensely involved in individual schools. Funding and organization of capacity-building measures for individual school sites are mainly left to local districts, which in the case of Maryland tend to be large and congruent with counties. In one of the two districts studied, about half of all schools are on probation. This district is necessarily strained in meeting special needs of reconstitution-eligible schools. In the other district only a small percentage of the schools are identified. Here the district supports its reconstitution-eligible schools more generously.

Up to the year 1999/2000 school year, the state put 98 schools on probation. These schools, as was mentioned, perform in the bottom rank with recently declining test scores and are faced with high educational loads. Of the 82 elementary and middle schools identified until 1998, students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch range from 32 percent to 100 percent, with a median of 77 percent. Most of the "reconstitution-eligible schools" (RE schools) in Maryland serve an African American student population (over 80 percent of the enrollment in most RE schools). The overwhelming majority (five sixths) of RE schools are located in the state's largest city, 10 percent are located in another local jurisdiction with a majority African American population, and only two schools are located in majority-white counties. One of these two schools finally exited the system as the first school on probation in the state to do so.

In the year 2000, the mean percentage of students passing the MSPAP with satisfactory performance or better for the 1996 cohort of reconstitution-eligible schools (1998 cohort in parentheses) is 16.3 (17) percent in reading and 14.1 (14.8) percent in mathematics for elementary schools (fifth grade), and 9.3 (13.3) percent in reading and 15.2 (22.9) in mathematics for middle schools. The state considers 70 percent of students scoring satisfactory on the MSPAP an acceptable benchmark. The gap between this benchmark and the performance of RE schools is still wide. Up until the end of data collection in the year 2000, three schools successfully exited the system; final sanctions were applied to three others. These three were taken over by the state and contracted to a private school management firm. "Reconstitution-eligibility" in Maryland, rather than a transitory stage, appears to be a protracted period of probation for schools facing exceptionally arduous challenges.

Figures from the state's accountability system are useful in gauging improvement expectations. The following are data from elementary and middle schools whose performance is primarily measured by the state's MSPAP test, given to third, fifth, and eighth graders every year. We only analyze data for fifth and eighth grade which are the exit grades for elementary and middle schools respectively. We select reading and mathematics scores because these are the areas where most schools on probation placed their strategic emphasis. Table II.1 displays mean MSPAP scores in percent of students passing "satisfactory" or better for the cohort of RE elementary and middle schools that were identified in 1996. The 1995 scores, the basis for identification in 1996 (the state actually uses two years), and the 1997 scores attained one and a half years after identification, as well as the 2000 scores are listed. A period of five years should be sufficient to detect some performance trends. The 1996 RE cohort (n=33) is compared with two groups: all schools in the state of Maryland and all schools in the state of Maryland that have a similar educational load as indicated by at least 50 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch meals. All 33 RE elementary and middle schools in the 1996 RE cohort are in the "above 50 percent free or reduced lunch" bracket. This comparison will give us a sense of how growth of RE schools stacks up with the rest of the state and schools with above-average educational loads. Table II.2 presents a similar analysis for the 1998 cohort of RE schools. In this case the table displays the 1997 scores as the basis for identification and the 1999 and 2000 scores.

Table II.1 – 1996 Cohort of RE Schools and Comparison Groups MSPAP Test Scores: Percent Scoring Satisfactory and Above

		Satisfactory and above (%)		
		1995	**1997**	**2000**
5th Grade Reading	1996 RE schools	6.4	10.7	16.3
	50% FRL schools*	13.1	18.6	25.2
	All Maryland schools	29.5	35.6	44.6
5th Grade Mathematics	1996 RE schools	7.1	10.5	14.1
	50% FRL schools*	22.9	23.6	24.8
	All Maryland schools	44.7	48.2	46.7
8th Grade Reading	1996 RE schools	6.5	8.1	9.3
	50% FRL schools*	9.6	10.5	11.6
	All Maryland schools	27.6	26.3	26.8
8th Grade Mathematics	1996 RE schools	8.5	10.3	15.2
	50% FRL schools*	15.5	17.2	19.7
	All Maryland schools	42.3	45.9	50.4

* Schools in which equal to or more than 50 % of students are receiving free or reduced lunch (FRL) programs.

Table II.2 – 1998 Cohort of RE Schools and Comparison Groups MSPAP Test Scores: Percent Scoring Satisfactory and Above

		Satisfactory and above (%)		
		1997	1999	2000
5th Grade Reading	1998 RE schools	9.6	13.3	17.0
	50% FRL schools*	18.6	24.0	25.2
	All Maryland schools	35.6	41.4	44.6
5th Grade Mathematics	1998 RE schools	7.7	12.5	14.8
	50% FRL schools*	23.6	26.3	24.8
	All Maryland schools	48.2	46.2	46.7
8th Grade Reading	1998 RE schools	7.9	12.5	13.3
	50% FRL schools*	10.5	10.5	11.6
	All Maryland schools	26.3	25.3	26.8
8th Grade Mathematics	1998 RE schools	11.8	22.5	22.9
	50% FRL schools*	17.2	17.2	19.7
	All Maryland schools	45.9	49.0	50.4

* Schools in which equal to or more than 50 % of students are receiving free or reduced lunch (FRL) programs.

Tables II.1 and II.2 show that overall growth on the MSPAP for all Maryland schools has been modest, in some areas flat, and in a few areas slightly declining, as indicated by the percentage of students passing the reading and mathematics portion of the MSPAP test with satisfaction ("percentage satisfactory"). By comparison, RE schools in both cohorts have consistently increased school performance. Although growth increments (expressed in percentage point differences of "satisfactory" students) are modest, year-to-year percentage point differences for RE schools are at least equal if not higher in some areas than those for all Maryland schools or schools with high free or reduced lunch participation. Particularly, the 1998 cohort has seen growth at a more solid rate. While generally RE schools perform well below the state average and below the performance levels of other high poverty schools, in the eighth grade the 1998 RE cohort as a whole was able to overtake mean performance levels of schools with high poverty levels. In summary, our figures show that probationary status for reconstitution is not associated with high performance growth, but at the same time RE schools, clearly bottom performers, are at least keeping pace with the state as a whole and in some areas grow at a slightly higher rate.

In many respects, probation may first and foremost be a tool to arrest decline and stagnation in persistently failing schools since the state targets schools for probation whose performance record indicates negative change. Tables II.3 and II.4 illustrate whether such a reversal of decline has occurred in RE schools. The table displays 10 of the 33 schools from the 1996 RE cohort (Table II.3) and 10 from the 1998 cohort (Table II.4) that have had the largest drop in performance as indicated by the difference between means of "percentage satisfactory" in math and reading in the year prior to identification. Subsequent mean differences indicate whether these exceptionally troubled schools were able to reverse their decline and stay the course. The ten or eleven highest decline schools in mathematics (Schools A through J or K, in 1998 two schools tied) are not necessarily identical with the highest decline schools in reading (Schools 1 through 10).

Table II.3 displays that for the 1996 cohort nine out of the ten highest-decline schools in reading (Schools 1 through 10) were able to reverse decline within a year and a half of identification. The same pattern holds for the 1998 cohort in Table II.4, but only 4 schools among the 1996 cohort and 5 among the 1998 cohort were able to compensate for the decline from the year of identification. In mathematics, the situation is less clear: 6 out of 10 among the 1996 cohort, and 8 out of 10 among the 1998 cohort reversed decline within a year and a half of identification, but only 3 schools from the 1996 cohort and 5 schools from the 1998 cohort compensated for previous decline. After the initial jolt of probation identification, schools' performance begins to lag again. For both cohorts, 5 out of 10 schools that were in highest decline in reading or mathematics at the time of identification decline again in mathematics after one year on probation – for the 1998 cohort, 7 out of 11 schools. Thus, probation status seems to initially jolt schools into reversal of decline, but the effect is not lasting. Scores begin to fluctuate again in subsequent years.

Table II.3 – Reversal or Decline in 10 Highest-Decline Schools in 1996 RE Cohort Differences in Percentage of Students Scoring Satisfactory and Above on the MSPAP

Reading					Mathematics				
1996 RE Schools*	94/95	95/97	97/98	98/00	1996 RE Schools*	94/95	95/97	97/98	98/00
School 1	-13.6	3.0	7.8	3.7	School A	-15.2	15.1	-5.8	-.5
School 2	-9.9	-.9	9.6	-10.1	School B	-13.6	8.0	-4.9	-3.1
School 3	-9.0	7.5	-6.6	4.5	School C	-11.9	16.1	-22.2	12.9
School 4	-8.6	1.4	1.4	3.1	School D	- 8.5	1.7	4.5	9.4
School 5	- 8.5	14.0	9.8	-3.8	School E	-7.9	0	2.0	21.3
School 6	- 8.4	5.5	-2.6	4.7	School F	- 7.1	-2.9	2.2	9.6
School 7	-7.6	13.8	0.9	1.3	School G	- 6.6	10.8	-8.6	3.0
School 8	-7.4	7.4	-1.2	19.6	School H	-5.6	-2.0	1.1	-1.2
School 9	-4.3	11.3	-7.3	5.8	School I	-5.2	-1.3	2.5	.2
School 10	-3.4	14.2	-4.5	-1.3	School J	-4.9	-6.8	-2.9	9.4

*Schools are middle and elementary schools with the highest decline in scoring from 1994 –1995, and were identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1996. Separate ranking for reading and mathematics. Schools 1 through 10 not necessarily identical with Schools A through J.

Table II.4 – Reversal or Decline of 10 Highest-Decline Schools in 1998 RE Cohort Differences in Percentage of Students Scoring Satisfactory and Above on the MSPAP

Reading				Mathematics			
1998 RE Schools**	**96/97**	**97/99**	**99/00**	**1998 RE Schools****	**96/97**	**97/99**	**99/00**
School 1	-20.9	8.4	-8.3	School A	-19.3	-7.9	17.3
School 2	-15.2	8.4	10.2	School B	-16.0	20.0	-4.3
School 3	-10.7	-.6	9.0	School C	-13.4	-5.7	-12.7
School 4	-10.4	15.2	-6.8	School D	-12.6	7.9	-1.9
School 5	-10.1	9.8	1.3	School E	-11.5	26.9	-8.6
School 6	-8.6	2.9	-7.7	School F	-11.0	6.8	-8.3
School 7	-6.8	7.8	2.8	School G	-9.7	1.2	37.6
School 8	-6.6	14.2	-4.9	School H	-8.7	6.4	-5.7
School 9	-6.2	19.7	.7	School I	-8.1	18.6	-11.8
School 10	-6.1	10.9	-2.2	School J	-7.9	19.4	6.7
				School K (tied)	-7.9	11.0	7.7

** Schools are middle and elementary schools with the highest decline in scoring from 1996 – 1997, and were identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1998. Separate ranking for reading nd mathematics. Schools 1 through 10 are not necessarily identical with Schools A through K

Based on these performance records, what are realistic growth expectations for schools on probation? Schools on probation in Maryland ("reconstitution-eligible" schools) enter the status due to bottom performance scores and high decline in years previous to identification. While the schools post only modest performance increments and develop unevenly, they do keep up with the rest of the state and other high-poverty schools in the state. At least initially, schools with a record of low performance and marked deterioration may reverse the worst decline. These marginal positive effects notwithstanding, it is apparent that thus far for the majority of schools probation has not spurred performance increases on a scale needed to swiftly lessen their tremendous performance lag. Thus, in our study of focal schools we need to explain why schools seem to improve somewhat, but also why change is not more forceful.

If schools were to double the percentage of satisfactory students (on the MSPAP) every five years as the 1996 cohort has managed to accomplish in some areas, then it might take between seven and ten years for that cohort to reach present state averages. The 1998 cohort which doubled these percentages in some areas within the first three years after identification would not take as long. But these figures are very inexact and highly speculative, since performance trajectories for schools have been fairly uneven and unpredictable. But if the exit criterion for probation is state average performance and if we assume that the state average on the MSPAP increases slowly over the next five to ten years and the growth rate of RE schools decreases as the proportion of higher performing students increases, then the 1996 cohort of RE schools may have to spend in excess of 10 to 15 years in the status of probation, all other things being equal.

2. Kentucky

In 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly passed HB 940, The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), in response to a 1989 Supreme Court decision which declared the Commonwealth's system of public schooling to be unconstitutional due to the inequity and inadequacy of funding provided for schools. KERA created a comprehensive system of governance and accountability strategies intended to encourage all students to perform at high levels.

The Act created accountability standards for all students, provided curriculum content guidelines and mandated assessments that reflected these standards. KERA also required that schools be governed by a site-based decision making (SBDM) council comprised of a body representative of parents, teachers and administrators. In addition, KERA provided a statewide system of professional development and also devoted considerable funding to the creation and maintenance of a technology network. A funding method was set up by the General Assembly that provided for equitable financial support to all local districts.

KERA outlined six learner goals specifying what all students should know and be able to do. Progress towards these goals was to be assessed through the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), recently redesigned and renamed CATS (Commonwealth Accountability Testing System). The test results include student responses on open-ended response and multiple choice questions on the formal assessment of reading, math, science, social studies, art/humanities and practical living/vocational courses, as well as scores on student writing portfolios. These academic components, combined with non-academic data such as measures of attendance, retention, dropout rates and the successful transition to adult life results in a composite index score for each school. Based on this score, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) sets a school-specific baseline index and biennial school-specific growth targets. This is the level of achievement for which the school is held accountable. According to this system, schools are held accountable for continuous improvement of their scores. All schools are to reach the same achievement level after a period of about 20 years regardless of initial baseline performance (by now the year 2014). Schools surpassing their predetermined index are eligible for rewards, while schools falling below the mark are eligible for state assistance in efforts to improve the school. Since CATS, schools are also compared to a band of other schools performing on the same level. In the Kentucky system, schools on all performance levels can enter probation, though schools with the lowest baseline scores have the largest gains to make each biennium.

The accountability index for each school is calculated by dividing student performance into cognitive and non-cognitive categories with the cognitive areas accounting for 84 percent and the non-cognitive 16 percent of the final index value. The cognitive categories and their weighted values are as follows (in 1998): math accounts for 14% of the final index value, reading 14%, science 14%, writing 14%, social studies 14%, arts & humanities 7%, and practical living/vocational studies 7%. Non-cognitive indicators account for the remaining 16 percent of the accountability index. The cognitive and non-cognitive scores are combined into a yearly accountability index. Two consecutive yearly indexes are then combined, using weighted values in accordance with the number of students tested in each year, to create a biennium index.

An improvement goal is set for each school against a baseline determined by prior KIRIS/CATS testing results by that same school. If a school achieves beyond its improvement goal then the school receives a financial reward. If the school does not meet its improvement goal, but its scores are still improving in comparison to its last biennium scores, it is required to develop and submit for approval a school improvement plan. If a school scores below its last biennium scores by not more than 5 percent it is declared "in decline." If a school scores significantly below its accountability baseline (5% or more below its previous biennium scores), it is declared "in crisis." Schools that are in decline for two consecutive biennia can also enter the "in crisis" stage.

Schools designated as "in decline" were required to participate in the School Transformation and Renewal Program (STAR). Once in the program, they were required to write a school transformation plan and were assigned a Distinguished Educator (DE) to assist in the implementation of the Transformation Plan. Recently, the system has been changed. Initially, intervention in schools not performing at expected levels was mandatory. However, since 1998 schools "in-decline" may opt out of the state assistance program, but they are still required to write and submit a plan.

As part of STAR, Kentucky created the role of the Distinguished Educator (DE) or recently renamed, the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE). This program component was designed to assist those schools performing below their baseline on the assessment with the help they needed to meet their accountability threshold in the next biennium. DEs or HSEs are teachers and administrators who work with schools to improve their curriculum and instruction and to implement the school improvement plan. With regard to school improvement planning, the HSEs lead schools through the planning process by assisting in the collection and analysis of data, identification of causes of decline, and provision of feedback about goals and suggestions of possible strategies for reaching these goals.

Once declared "in crisis" sanctions and penalties intensify. The school must notify parents of the right to transfer their children to a more successful school. By design, what happens to a school is then in the hands of the DE/HSE. They have the authority to make all decisions previously made by staff, assist in curriculum practices, promote community engagement, and coordinate external reviews. The DE/HSEs can evaluate all staff members every six months in accordance with standards developed in their individual growth plans. At the end of the evaluation period, DE/HSEs can recommend the dismissal or transfer of any school staff member who fails to meet the growth goal or are judged to be acting in a manner resistant to improvement efforts. All such disciplinary actions are dealt with on an individual basis. In schools designated "in decline", the DE/HSE's role is more advisory.

In order to graduate from STAR, schools must meet the original threshold (goal) that put them into the Star Program. This judgment is not made each year, but at the end of each biennium. Consider the following example:

Biennium weighted average index for 1992-93 + 1993-94 = 50 (baseline)
Growth goal (threshold) for the 1994-95 + 1995-96 biennium = 55 (baseline x 1.1)
Weighted average index for the 1994-95 + 1995-96 biennium = 45 (actual score)
Weighted average index for the 1996-97 + 1997-98 biennium = 58 (actual score)

In this illustration the school was declared in crisis and admitted into the STAR program on the basis of its second biennium score of 45. With its third biennium score of 58 the school has surpassed its original threshold goal of 55 and is graduated from the STAR program. If, in this example the third biennium index was 48, the school would be considered in crisis and would continue in the STAR Program for the next biennium.

Because the state changed the format of the test from KIRIS to CATS in the middle of our study, we could not carry out the kind of quantitative analysis that was possible for the Maryland reconstitution-eligible schools. The only indication we have about probation's success in Kentucky are entrance and exit statistics. From 1993 to 96 the state entered 53 schools into the STAR program of which 16 did not manage to exit probation. For the next biennium (1996-98) an additional 250 schools were identified. Most of those schools did not continue in the status. But their exit coincided with a redesign of the system. Because of the change in tests, new baselines had to be established and no new schools were identified in 1998. Although the overwhelming majority of schools successfully exited their probation as of 1998, the disruption of continuity in the accountability system makes interpretation of these figures difficult.

3. The Kentucky and Maryland Accountability Systems Compared

In Table II.5 we provide a brief synopsis of the key differences between the two systems. A more detailed description is given in Part IX where differences are analyzed in the context of the two states' policy developments.

Table II.5 - System Designs for Probation (Maryland, Kentucky)

	Threat of final sanctions	Improvement Plan	Monitoring Review	Technical Support	Selection Criteria, indicators
MD	State take-over (private vendor); loss of building assignment (3 schools with final sanction)	Required	State monitors; School audits	Left to local districts	State assessment tests (MSPAP, MFT); basic proficiency and performance-based formats for middle schools; Non-cognitive indicators
KY	Loss of assignment; Loss of job (not enforced yet)	Required	DE/HSE; School councils; School audits	Provided by state-dispatched DE/HSE; not mandatory for "decline" as of 1999	State assessment tests (KIRIS/CATS), mixed performance and multiple choice; Non-cognitive indicators

PART III. PROBATION AND PERFORMANCE MOTIVATION

In the theoretical discussion in Part I, we distinguished between three distinct, but interdependent dynamics that may motivate educators to increase their performance. In short, these dynamics can be characterized as (1) external pressure, (2) meaningful accountability, and (3) organizational capacity. Each dynamic highlights a distinct set of factors. Firstly, in a dynamic of external pressure, public stigma and fear as well as external mandates and clear programmatic directions coupled with internal enforcement of rules and policies mobilizes educators. Secondly, in a dynamic of meaningful accountability, educators act because they recognize the standards and goals of the accountability system, or the rewards the system bestows, as important, fair, valid, realistic, and attainable given educators' individual skills and professional capacities. Thirdly, in a dynamic of organizational capacity, the strength of social interactions at the workplace combined with externally induced capacity building measures moves employees forward. In their move to take up the challenge of probation, schools bank on organizational cohesion, collegial support, sharing the burden of accountability among members of the performance unit, supportive leadership, and the provision of capacity building. In the practical life of schools, these analytically distinct dynamics will be intertwined. External pressures of varying strengths will encounter schools (and districts) of different organizational capacity in which accountability will mean different things to different people. Yet, the presence or strength of particular sets of factors in the lives of schools may make one dynamic more preponderant than others.

We are guided in this study by the assumption that probation will have to transcend a dynamic of external pressure if the policy is to motivate high performance, learning, and change in the core of curriculum and instruction. Such changes may be forthcoming inasmuch as teachers come to accept accountability standards as reasonable and fair despite performance shortcomings and inasmuch as schools are provided the opportunity and capacity to learn and change. This is particularly the case for the accountability systems of Maryland and Kentucky, two states that are nationally known for their ambitious efforts of combining performance accountability with instructional reform. Since teachers have a certain degree of autonomy in the performance of their work, an element of self-directedness is crucial for the success of probation. Indeed, it has been a cardinal claim of advocates of incentive policies that high-stakes accountability systems do have the motivational power to make educators at schools active participants in school improvement, steered by external goals and engaged in a search for the means to achieve them. In Part III of this report, we therefore ask firstly if probation induces in teachers the willingness to increase performance while at the same time remaining committed to an organization that has been publicly stigmatized as failing; and secondly what dynamics can explain their responses.

Teachers may receive and interpret the signal of probation in a variety of ways: they may ignore it, feel strongly pressured, threatened, or shamed by it, they may comply with it in a minimal way, or they might accept it as valid and justified. They may deflect blemish by attributing their school's decline to external causes; alternatively probation may occasion reflection on personal or school performance shortcomings. As a meaningful guide for one's actions, the accountability system may tap into an individual's reward calculus or into his or her more deeply held educational meanings and values (see Part I). In the reward-calculus model, performance motivation is framed as a function of expectancy, valence, and capacity. That is, willingness to increase work performance may vary according to teachers' expectations to receive rewards for meeting performance goals of the accountability agency, the value they place on the rewards, and finally their sense of capacity to influence performance outcomes. Rewards would primarily consist of averting sanctions and stigma, and public recognition for increased test scores. Alternatively, performance motivation may be rooted in the personal meanings and internalized standards that teachers attach to their work and with which they judge themselves. In this model, the motivational power of probation would depend on the congruence of internal standards with external criteria of the accountability agency. Teachers would not only gauge the value of potential rewards, but also the fairness of external assessment criteria and the worthiness of the accountability system's goals in light of their ideals. Valence, expectancy, and capacity are useful constructs for both motivational models. In a reward calculus, extrinsic rewards (such as overcoming the public stigma) may be more in the forefront, in a self-concept based model the value of the system as a gauge of one's educational values.

The relationship between work motivation and commitment to one's workplace is not very clear. Even workers that answer positively to performance pressures or challenges by working hard may harbor the desire to leave the stressful and stigmatized work environment, despite prospects of rewards. Yet, more congruence between work motivation and commitment may be expected if accountability systems tap into teachers' more deep-seated values, ideals, and performance standards.

Schools, regardless of their current performance status, have a history of reform and improvement. In some schools, improvement activities may have soared prior to their current predicament, in others it may have been flat. The strength of internal social relationships among staff and between staff and leadership may create or reinforce individual dispositions to get involved, increase effort, and stay committed to the organization. Thus, this social source of performance motivation may have generated momentum for school improvement prior to and perhaps irrespective of the school's status, reinforce a productive internalization of external performance goals, or shore up defenses against the stigma of probation and accountability demands. Under conditions of group accountability, these social capacities may strongly influence individual employees' reward expectation. Likewise, the provision of external support, in the form of additional resources, personnel, materials, professional development, or change agentry may enhance internal organizational capacity, but may also influence dispositions towards the accountability system.

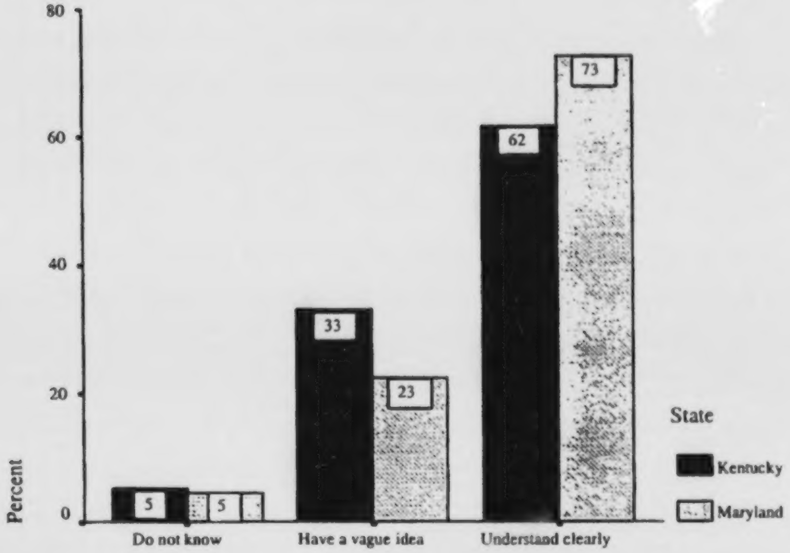
In light of these theoretical considerations, we begin our analysis in Part III with an exposition of teachers' interpretation of the signal of probation, their sense of skill and capacity (indicated by work experience, educational background, sense of professionalism, efficacy, and skill), and their analysis of the school's "failure." Next, with the help of the concepts of goal importance, validity, fairness, realism, and direction we explore the direction and meaning issuing from the accountability system. Teachers' interpretations of the signal, their "failure analysis," the meaning and direction of accountability systems, and organizational capacities in the form of social interactions at the work are used to explain teachers' willingness to become engaged and increase work effort. Lastly, we discuss the relationship between probation and teachers' commitment to their school.

1. Interpretation of the Signal

Knowledge and Awareness

Awareness of the signal of probation among educators in the eleven schools is reportedly very high. On the survey, a large majority of respondents (62 percent KY/ 73 percent MD) say they "understand clearly" what probation means for their school (see Figure III.1). Only five percent do not know anything about it, and a third (KY) to a fourth (MD) of respondents have only a vague idea about what probation means for their school.

Figure III.1 - Understanding of Probation



Judging from the interviews conducted in the schools, awareness and knowledge of probation looked less widespread. They varied among teachers, but generally detailed knowledge was not common. In some schools, probation was high profile, such as in School B in Maryland:

> Because our administrators are so terrified over just the whole recon process. So, it's like, it is so tattooed in our minds.... And I mean that may be good because that is an improvement to the school. So you really, we have people who are constantly talking about it constantly, so we're definitely talking the talk. So, that's a reason why. (B-11)

Two of the seven Maryland schools (Schools D and E) had been on probation for three years at the time of data collection. In these two schools, particularly in the larger middle school, we found teachers who were quite unaware of the policy. This was particularly true for the many new teachers in these schools, but even for more veteran teachers, reconstitution-eligibility did not feature highly on their attention screen. Ms. D. at School D expressed her knowledge of probation in this way:

> Well, that's a good question. What does [reconstitution] mean? I don't know. I'm a little hard-pressed outside of the fact that I know that there are just pressures, and not only pressures, but also, you know, stated commitments that are either placed on you by, you know, outside, you know, authorities, that you have to, you know, subscribe to, adhere to and come up with, at the end, having met these, you know, goals and expectations and so forth. So, you know, I know that that's going on. But, other than that, it doesn't seem to, you know, it doesn't seem to have any other meaning.... I don't know whether I think it's a threat. I know it's a lot, let me say it like this: what it imposes is something that you can't see, and it's kind of like (and I call it a pressure), it's kind of like a pressure that you know is there. The pace is accelerated. The amount of paperwork is quadrupled, and the amount of, let me see, the paperwork, and the kind of anticipation is kind of heightened. But, there's no, and all of that is stuff you can't really see except for the, you know, the paperwork. And it's, it kind of makes it feel like you know something's going on, but you can't quite put your finger on it. (D-3)

Mr. G, as an eight grade Math teacher being directly responsible for students' test preparation, commented on his knowledge of probation:

> I have no idea....All I know is that every time something comes up the next thing they say is, well we know the school is reconstitution-eligible, and it seems like every time there's a decision to be made we got to worry about whether or not the school is reconstitution-eligible. It's like everything is, that's it, everything is focussed around that. But what is reconstitution eligible? I have no idea. The bottom line is I know I have a group of kids for me to learn. I will focus on teaching them. That's my perspective. As far as the administration, that's their responsibility for reconstitution eligible. (D-20)

The new dean of discipline in School D gave his impressions of the school's dealing with probation:

> I didn't hear a lot of talk about it [reconstitution]. Only at like, staff meetings, or staff development activities. That wasn't at every staff meeting, but every now and then it did come up. I didn't hear a lot of concerns about it from teachers. (D-11)

In newly-identified schools, probation seemed to be of higher concern for teachers, but in the more long-term probationary schools the effect wore off as public attention waned, parental attention did not materialize as strongly, colleagues outside of school became indifferent, and state and districts seemed inactive. In the Maryland District A, where the two long-term probationary schools are located, half of all schools carry the "reconstitution-eligible" or "RE" label. Over the years, teachers learned to live with it. In these schools, the signal of probation became habituated, triggering little heightened concern. In the Maryland District B, "being RE" was still a noticeable badge of poor performance, and "getting off the list" was more strongly desired. Because of high teacher turnover in the Maryland schools, larger numbers of new teachers entering the school subsequent to identification were either not at all or only vaguely aware of what it meant to be in a RE school. Or if they were aware, they felt they did not own the problem, since they were not present during the decline. For most new hires we interviewed, RE did not figure into their decision to accept a position at the school and quite a few interviewees did not know that their new workplace was on probation until they began their new teaching assignment.

In the four Kentucky schools, interviewees seemed to be more aware of their schools' status, but could not quite imagine final sanctions:

> I guess I'm aware in the back of my mind that it's a possibility that teachers could lose their jobs if the scores aren't raised. I don't see that as being the first or the most likely possibility because I don't think it's very practical and I think that there would be too many professionals that would realize that it was the wrong thing to do because I think that anybody who works in education knows that the teachers and a school with students who maybe struggle more or have more needs are, a lot of times, the better

> teachers or the teachers who work... who get more training and who are more involved because teachers who don't want to do the extra things that it takes to work with students who need more are going to go to a school where the students are easier to work with. (KY 20-11)

> I guess [the sanctions] ...kind of seem, I don't know, unreal. I don't know that it wouldn't happen, but it's hard to kind of see someone coming and closing down the whole school and saying, "You've all been in decline for so long. You are continually going down as far as those test scores." I guess it's just hard to imagine, but there is that, kind of that fear there that there could be position changes or people from outside coming in. (KY 40-14; middle school creative writing teacher)

Teachers in Maryland, as well, could not quite picture what final sanctions could look like. In one district, many knew of a few schools that the district had subjected to zero-based staffing with reportedly disastrous results (Finklestein et al., 2000). Consequently, they did not expect a repeat of that in the near future. For some, state takeover, the final sanction in Maryland, merely meant that "well, instead of [the district] telling us what to do, the state will" (E-9). Likewise, teachers in Maryland were at a loss to explain how to exit probationary status:

> You know, we posed that question. We have posed that question for [the superintendent]: 'What is it to be un-, or non-eligible…reconstitution eligible? What is that?' And do you know what? They don't have an answer for that. Nobody knows what it takes to get off the list. (D-3)

Probation as Sanction or Support

Probation may elicit a variety of affective reactions that may shape the policy's motivational impact on teachers. Teachers may positively embrace probation as a "wake-up call" or they fear probation because they "feel more anxious about their career" as they contemplate the repercussions of their schools' probationary status. Furthermore, teachers may grasp probation as an unmistakable demand by the authorities "to shape up," the latter connoting the more punitive and forceful aspects of the signal. In the questionnaire, we covered a spectrum of emotions that probation may have triggered, such as positive challenge, anxiety, and pressure. Based on the quantitative data, there is no clear modal affective response to the signal of probation. Neither anxiety, positive challenge, nor sense of pressure prevail. Rather, responding teachers are divided over how to interpret the signal. A little over one fourth of the respondents embrace probation as a wake-up call, but a third rejects this notion. Similarly, a third agrees with the notion that probation is the state's signal for teachers to shape up, but another third rejects this.

Table III.1 - Interpretation of the Signal of Probation

	Percent "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"		
	Maryland	**Kentucky**	**Total**
	(*N* = 170 –173)	(*N* = 91-96)	(N = 261-169)
Wake-up call	36	18	30
More anxious about career	37	52	42
Time for teachers to shape up	39	20	33

Among the three reactions we tested, feeling anxious about one's career is the strongest feeling; 42 percent of respondents feel more anxious about their career despite the fact that up till now neither state has carried out sanctions that have negatively impacted teachers personally. But the potential of, as yet distant, sanctions seems to worry a good number of teachers (see also Kelley & Protsik, 1997; Firestone, Mayrowetz & Fairman, 1997). Anxiety is more prevalent among Kentucky teachers than Maryland teachers.

In the interviews, some teachers admitted to fear, anxiety, and foreboding, such as this Maryland elementary school teacher:

> Oh, I was terrified at first.... I was just thinking that, I really don't know. Just something about it just terrified me. I said..."Well, maybe we're not doing our jobs well," you know. But I know our teachers are doing the best that they can...I felt like, that a lot of us were just going to get transferred or...I don't know. I just can't, I just can't describe how, you know, how.... I was very fearful. (F-6)

But the great majority denied feeling that way. Rather, they voiced a melange of hope, disappointment, and anger. Some, mostly senior teachers, took the verdict of probation to heart:

> Before it was actually placed in the paper, I kind of figured it was coming, it was going to come to that state, and I took it very personally, because of the efforts that I've made in the years that I've been here. And I really took it personally. It was almost like, I had broken an arm, and I was in a lot of pain that particular day, and I internalized it, because I spend a lot of time after hours here, spend a lot of time preparing for labs, and you know, cleaning up after labs. So, I really took it personally. (A-19; eighth grade science teacher)

> I took it very personal. I was very down because I don't, the twenty-five years that I have been teaching, I have never received any type of grading under superior. I remember when I first began teaching, the first principal I ever had told me that she had...as a twenty-one year old that she saw that I was the type of person that was just born to be a teacher. There's some teachers who were born to be a teacher. So, from then on, I have always looked upon my job as that, as really a professional teacher. And so when I first heard, I took it very personal. I -- it felt as if they had told me that I, personally, had been reconstituted. (F-17; elementary school consulting teacher)

> [I was] very demoralized. I felt really down. I felt like everyone would think I was a failure and a bad teacher because I feel like that's where all of the accountability is. It's on the teachers. There's no involvement -- there's no parental accountability, there's no student accountability, it's basically the teachers and the staff that's supposedly the problem......Sometimes. I'm afraid that... You know, they say because of KERA that they can close your school, they can fire the teachers. I'm really concerned because I'm

> three years away from retirement. I think that would be a real detriment to everybody. It would be even more demoralizing than the decline issue because it's in the paper every day. "___Middle School in Decline" and you read that, and when someone says, "Where do you work?" and you answer, they're like "Oh, that's that school." That's very disheartening when you work as hard as you work as a teacher. (KY 20-09; middle school language arts teacher)
>
> I remember it was, I was watching the early morning news, and it listed the schools, and [School B's] name was mentioned. I was absolutely mortified. I felt really, really bad, because I know how hard the teachers work here, and a sense of embarrassment. There really was, because I always considered myself to be on target.... and a team player. I was really embarrassed. And when we, and I have friends who are teachers, I was embarrassed by it.... So there was a sense of embarrassment, and a sense of almost helplessness.... So, we have to prove ourselves, but I don't think a lot of people, especially young people, young teachers, are willing to go through that stigma and remain in education, or go through that stigma and remain in this system, or in this school, or recon schools. And so, I'm not sure. (B-7).

Fewer teachers reported thinking critically about their work:

> I was disappointed of course. It's kind of hard to explain. In some ways, I thought, you know, I had questions with all that as far as my teaching and wondering if there were some things that I could have done that may have helped students learn more, to be better prepared for the test or if there was something that I did do that had a backward effect or a negative effect. I guess just disappointment would be the correct summation (KY 20-14)

But many more interviewees found ways to distance themselves from probation:

> Actually, you know, first I was like, "Oh, you know, they're going to think it's our fault because I teach fifth grade and it's a MSPAP grade, last year was my first year, and the scores went down." So obviously, you know, everybody's going to be looking at you, but the more I think about it, it's a positive thing because I know that it's not just myself. (C-9; novice elementary school teacher)
>
> I viewed it as a very negative cast over the school and over me, because I thought it was basically speaking about my instructional leadership. But then on reflection, I realized that it wasn't about me. I wasn't going to make it be about me personally, and if I were to, in any way, salvage the morale of the people with whom I was working, and also say to people

> outside of myself, 'cause I'd already convinced myself that I'm quite capable and able to do the things that I set out to do: if you're clear about what you want done, then I can get it done. So, once I, on reflection, cleared my head of any guilt feelings, then I was able to move forward. (E-7; elementary school principal)

> I guess I feel like we were misunderstood and then I just, I was a little angry because the media seemed to blow it out of proportion that we were a school in decline and therefore our staff kind of looked bad because we didn't seem to be helping the students and it was just a bad misconception, I think. I know personally within myself, I was doing the best that I could with the students I had. (KY 20-03)

Teachers with little or no seniority at their school often found other ways to disassociate themselves from probation:

> It didn't make me feel too bad, because of the fact that I wasn't here when the actual test was taken. So, I really didn't feel bad, personally, for myself. There were some other teachers, I think, who were newer teachers who were like, "Oh...it's so bad, we just..." I'm like, we weren't here when it happened, so don't get upset by it.... I feel confident in myself, what I'm doing, and I feel as though as a teacher, I am doing what I'm supposed to do to make sure that the kids understand the lesson. (B-8)

"Why did you wait for us to fail before you stepped in?"

Teachers in both states hoped that probation was not meant to be punitive. Particularly in Maryland's District B, where fewer schools are on probation, reconstitution-eligibility was associated with more funds, personnel, and resources. In District A, hope for resources was more vague, but certainty was stronger that not too much would happen as a result of probation. For the principal of School A, probation was:

> ...a blessing in disguise, and I've communicated that to the staff, and they're actually following my lead...So, they've promised us quite a bit of money and resources and if they deliver, that means the state department. I

> think there will be quite a few things we'll be able to do, so, it doesn't bother me that we're reconstitution eligible. (A-01)

The reading specialist in the same school echoed a similar sentiment:

> I suppose it was one, initially of some disappointment because we'd worked so hard in the past three years to do what we thought was just an incredible effort toward, especially MSPAP preparation and tightening instruction and aligning curriculum, and it was something that was initially a bit disappointing, but we had already known that it was a possibility. And we were encouraged by the fact that we weren't left to continue to, I would say, I hope, not fail, but not do as well as we could. And so it was more, I think, tempered with hope that this could maybe... obviously we needed help.... This would be one source of that help. Well, we were assured immediately that jobs weren't at stake in terms of those that wanted to stay that were, you know, in it for the ultimate gain which is to turn it around. You would have just as much support, if not more, now that the state was coming on board. (A-3)

In another middle school in the same district, a seventh grade English teacher related:

> I heard some people worried about the state coming in and taking us over and telling us how we had to do things and then others saying the state will come in and give us more materials and actually help us. I tend to believe that side of it.... I'm not fearful at all... .I'm just very competent about what I do in my classroom, and the kids learn a lot, and we're always working.... I guess I just don't see it as they would replace the teachers. It's just them saying they're taking responsibility for the school. And from what I've seen, of the other schools they reconstituted, it made no difference. The schools truly didn't change. It was as if it was destined for the scores to drop no matter what.... But as long as it brings the state in and as long as it brings money, and computers and technology, they can say what they want. (B-1; District B)

Her colleague, also a seventh grade English teacher, seconded:

> The stigma is the minus, but the programs that come about from that is a plus. You know, it's kind of two-sided.... I think, you know, the programs that would come about because of it, you know, it outweighs the negative. I think it's good, but I think that they should get rid of the bad stigma that goes with it. (B-5; District B)
>
> I've always worked at very poor schools, where we barely had, and you know, we had to personally spend our own money to even do, you know,

> labs or whatever. So, I felt that, number one, being reconstituted there would be available resources that I wasn't normally accustomed to.... I didn't see it as a threat. I saw it as, you know, gee, this school has been identified, it's, you know, it has its problems. The problems have been identified, and we're on the road to doing something about the problem. (D-2; elementary school teacher, District A)

In Kentucky, teachers associated probation or "in decline" status with the services of a distinguished or highly skilled educator (DE/HSE):

> Well, naturally I was disappointed. I was hoping that the..and I'm sure the teachers were quite disappointed because they do work very hard. I believe the assistance of the highly skilled educator has been beneficial. She started in January and she has provided assistance with open response questions, writing portfolios. [She] has worked individually with teachers. (KY10-01; principal)

> Well, I'm glad we're going to get help. That's the good part of it, to get help. You know we need help. I feel sometimes that we're being held accountable for things that we have no control over. (KY 10-05; second grade teacher)

> Well obviously we wished that it, you know, that it was not necessary, but I'm glad that we have the help of someone [the HSE] to try and meet the needs of the children. (KY 10-06)

The dire need for resources that these teachers experienced made them accept probation as a necessary evil. Many bemoaned that it would have to take such a punitive label for the state and the districts to come forward with additional support and attention:

> You know, they make it seem like when the school gets reconstitution eligible, people want to think like, "We don't need help." We've been crying for help for years, you know, it's just, I've always said, the only thing that bothers, I think bothers me, I think bothers other teachers is that to get the help that you've been asking for, something negative has to happen. You can't just ask for the help when you need it. (A-2; eighth grade science)

Thus, probation became a mixed signal and overcoming probation a dilemma, as the principal of School C in an informal conversation shared: on one hand, he wanted to be rid of the stigma through continuous improvement of the test scores, but on the other hand, he did not feel he could afford to lose the probation label altogether. When teachers felt probation came without additional support, as in some schools in District A in Maryland, they reacted with scorn and bitterness.

A minority of respondents outright welcomed the state's intervention. They felt that accountability would be beneficial for their school as a lever for change and resources. Some teachers in Maryland went as far as embracing state takeover if it brought in another force that would have to take responsibility for the affairs of the school, but skepticism prevailed as to the capacity of the state making a difference:

> I was glad. I was really glad, because there were a lot of things going on that needed to be, to be fixed. You know, children were being passed on, even though they were definitely not ready. We didn't have materials to, you know, really bring the curriculum up to the MSPAP quality, and everybody was struggling, trying to find, you know, materials wherever to, the children didn't care. I've seen them destroy school property so, you know, it was reported, nothing ever happened. And, this year we have more materials than we can use, well you know, whatever we need is here or they get it for us. We have in-house resource groups now, and it's just a totally new world. I feel very comfortable this year, you know, even being, having been here twelve years, there are times where even I need a little help. (A-13; English, eighth grade, two years before retirement)

The school improvement resource teacher at School A was one of the outright supporters of probation:

> So in a certain extent, we're in kind of a fishbowl and stuff like that, but when that happens you're held accountable. You have to produce, and I was in one school just for one year, and there was no accountability at that school, and teachers kind of just did what they wanted, and I couldn't stay there. (A-15)

Similarly, the vice principal of an elementary school viewed reconstitution-eligibility positively. For her, probation was not only a way for the school to obtain additional attention and resources, but also to put faculty on notice:

> I was not surprised at all, and I welcomed it [probation] because they need help. That's what I thought. The school needs help and what better way than to have the state people come in and try to monitor and see that everyone here is really trying to do the best job, and it's not the teacher or the administrators the reason why the school is the way it is. It's because of the location and the type of population that we have. (C-6)

When teachers welcomed probation they either saw it as a way to garner support or as a wake-up call. But they rarely directed such a wake-up at themselves. The following quote comes from a teacher at School G, a school that had had the reputation for academic excellence, but had recently fallen on hard times:

> Maybe all the schools had been rezoned the previous year, but I still felt as if the tradition had been there, and it took me a year to realize that the problem was not my inability to get the students to work up to standards, it was the fact that the standards had been allowed to fall into, had been allowed to fall very low and as a result, no, I was not at all surprised, I was quite pleased when the school was designated reconstitution eligible. I don't think the state department or anybody else can really come into my room or some of the other rooms in this building and show me something which is going to significantly change the quality of instruction the children are receiving. I'm a good teacher, and I base that on the opinions of my colleagues, on the opinions of my parents here of my children. I'm also pretty tough. (G-1; social studies, seventh/eighth grade)

A middle school teacher hoped for the state's firm hand to shore up the authority of the school in solving a rampant discipline problem:

> Once the state comes in, hopefully, they'll put some draconian laws into effect and the students will have to fall in line.... I think the teachers try to maintain a certain level of decorum and education, and stuff like that, but students often feel that they can disrespect the authority figures in the school and get away with it. (D-17; social studies)

In one Kentucky school with a tradition of innovation, probation was seen as a lever to rally the faculty:

> ...and so while somebody may have thought about the Modern Red Schoolhouse, there is no way we would have been able to get our faculty to buy into that program because with that program, you had to have a certain percentage of the faculty agree to participate and do what they are going to be asked to do, and our faculty probably, we just wouldn't have gotten that percentage had there not been the cloud of decline hanging over there in the background saying, "You know people are going to think that we are not doing our job. We've got to do something different." So the decline forced us to really look at ourselves and decide that something had to be changed and for us we decided to go for Modern Red. (KY 30-03; fifth grade teacher)

Thus, teachers and administrators welcomed probation for a variety of reasons. But almost none of the supporters interpreted it as an incentive to examine their own teaching and practice. Either they associated it with external benefits or they saw it as a lever to move other people in a particular direction, the latter view being popular among administrators.

Well, the Feeling Was, "Fine, Fire Me!"

Teachers scoffed at the punitive aspects of probation. They overwhelmingly expressed confidence in their abilities. In fact, they felt indispensable for the difficult task of educating socially challenging students and were proud of having developed a special competence in surviving the difficult socioeconomic environment of their students. Furthermore, they felt that in times of teacher shortage a job at another school could always be found. For many interviewees from Maryland, ties to the specific school were weak, and, in interviews, many respondents admitted that they had considering moving or transferring elsewhere:

> I feel that I --, I think I do a good job, based on what we face here, but the reason why I chose this profession is to work with children and to provide the best services for children. So, I'm not selfish enough to be here for just a job, OK. And, I'm here for children, so if there's someone else that could be here, and say, "Well, look, this person can do this job better than what Mr. A. can," then I would like that person to be in this position. (C-2; guidance counselor, elementary school)
>
> I don't think I took it [probation] personally. I mean, I know it's not just coming from one person or from one aspect. There's a lot of factors involved in class.... If somebody thinks they can come in and do a better job, bring it on. (C-10, math specialist, elementary school)
>
> Basically, if you think you can do it better, come in, step in, and feel free to show us how to do it any better than how we've been trying to do it.... They [the state] lay these threats on the table, "We're gonna come take you over." And you just get to the point where you say....[....] You know, they came, and all the news cameras were here, and of course the only teacher that they caught on television was me, walking my children down the hall. I said, "Now every person in this state is going to say, 'There's the teacher that represents a poor and failing school.'" And I just, it was just heartbreaking because it wasn't the case, and even when the camera man turned the camera off, he said, "How come your children weren't running down the hall?" I said, "My children don't behave that way.".... Originally they were talking about us going back to zero-based staffing, and you'd have to reapply for your job, but I didn't, I wasn't personally concerned that I wasn't going to have a job. And plus, I knew too, that if it wasn't here, I'd be someplace else because I wasn't outright fired. So, I wasn't that worried. I was more concerned with, oh, how bad it's going to be when we come back in the fall? Well, the feeling was, "Fine, fire me!" (E-3, first probation elementary school in Maryland)
>
> I was so embarrassed. To me, it was an absolute insult, because I really didn't feel the assessment instrument the state was using tested what we were doing. I felt horrible about it, just embarrassed, humiliated. I didn't want to tell anybody that we were one of those schools.... I am anxious for someone to show us a way that we can improve, as long as it truly is an improvement on what the children are learning and able to do. And I'm not so sure what the state is using as an assessment shows, answers that. I'm not sure about that. But, personally, no, I don't have any threat. Hey, I

> have an ego problem. If someone thinks that they can do a better job than me, then come on and show me. I'd be anxious to learn that. (F-8)
>
> I mean we were supposed to be in fear of whatever, but my feeling on it is it that if somebody else can do a better job…come in and do it. Because you know I can't work any harder. I have two children at home and I don't leave this school until 4 or 4:30 every day. Come up here on weekends sometimes, and I just don't think we have the evaluation process down right. (KY 30-05; third grade teacher)

Confidence bordered on bravado when interviewees called "the state's bluff:"

> I could see it if the state had a good curriculum per se that they have done. Why take it over when you don't have anything to offer? What are they going to offer? (E-12; first elementary school on probation in Maryland)
>
> ...and I'll tell you why. The state can't do any better. (G-6, seventh/eighth grade mathematics)
>
> I don't perceive there being a line of people lined up for our jobs and so no, I don't fear it. (KY 10-06)
>
> When we first got the word, and I discussed with you before, I told you how hurt I was and I was kind of ashamed and so forth and then I had to have a talk with myself and say, "L., you're not recon. You are in a school that is reconstituted, the school, not you, not the children." It's the work that they were producing and so forth. At first, I thought it was going to be a real wake-up call, and years ago …you would hear that happening, "Oh, the state will be in and they're going to be on you and they're going to be monitoring every day and so forth." Well, I found out that they don't even do that. They come in when they come in and it's no different. To be honest, it's no different. I have to be honest. (F-04, consulting teacher)

In summary, there is no clear pattern in educators' interpretation of the signal of probation. In most of the eleven schools teachers reported being aware of the signal, though a detailed knowledge of what probation actually entailed was often missing. In the schools that had been on probation for a few years at the time of data collection, awareness and knowledge was very sketchy. It seemed that the signal wore off as schools became used to the stigma. Some interviewees reported initially feeling depressed and fearful when the school was identified, but for many these feelings wore off as they found ways to personally distance themselves from the verdict. Most did not fear, nor could they picture final sanctions. Rather they expressed a defiant attitude towards distant state authorities whose capacity to do a better job was held in doubt. Probation, many teachers said, equaled help or ought to bring support or resources to their school; and some, with a dose of sarcasm, were willing to endure the negative stigma in return for that support.

2. Teacher Capacity

In the interviews, teachers for the most part expressed confidence in their qualifications and in their capacity to teach. We tested this sense of capacity quantitatively. We wanted to know how teachers characterized themselves as professionals and how their sense of capacity was related to their response to probation. Sense of capacity is a key concept in explaining teachers' performance motivation. If employees do not believe they have the requisite skills to perform the task required to garner the reward, they are unlikely to expend additional energy and effort. On the other hand, a high sense of capacity should not preclude teachers from looking realistically at performance shortcomings.

Teacher quality and sense of capacity in the survey were captured by a number of objective and subjective indicators. We used teachers' work experience, their tenure in the current school, certification, and their educational background as crude objective indicators of quality. We asked teachers to self-rate their capacity according to a number of criteria: preparedness for one's job, self-characterization as a professional, teaching efficacy, willingness to exert effort, and skills pertaining to the state's performance expectations. If probation is going to work, we would expect high quality teachers, i.e. educated and experienced teachers with a high sense of professional capacity and efficacy, to react positively to the state's signal, though we must caution when interpreting self-ratings that high subjective capacity ratings may not necessarily be indicative of high work quality.

Work Experience

In the four Kentucky schools, respondents' mean total work experience in education was 15 years. A little less than one fourth (23 percent) had been in education for five years or less. Mean number of years in the current school was 8 years; 53 percent of all responding teachers in the four Kentucky schools had been in their school for five years or less. While in terms of career and life span the figures from the four Kentucky schools indicated a fairly normal distribution, tenure at school sites is biased towards the shorter term.

In the seven Maryland schools, mean number of years in education (11 years) was four years lower than in Kentucky. Almost one half of respondents (46 percent) had been in their career for five years or less. Respondents had been in their current school for a mean of only five years; 71 percent had been at their current school five years or less. In two Maryland schools, the average number of years at the current school was just 3 years. Thus, in the seven Maryland schools on probation, the staff tended to be young, and tenure tended to be short. Presumably, the Maryland schools on probation, more so than the Kentucky schools, were adversely affected by the mounting national teacher shortage that has led to fierce competition among districts for experienced and qualified staff (Blair, 2000). As indicated by our sample, schools on probation in Maryland seem to be losers in this competitive race and seem to attract high proportions of younger teachers for shorter periods of time. As a result, faculties in the seven Maryland schools appeared to be more unstable than faculties in the Kentucky schools. Perhaps in contrast to the situation in Kentucky, many Maryland school districts are large and in fairly close geographic proximity to each other, giving qualified teachers ample opportunity to find employment outside of their present district or to transfer within it. Moreover, Kentucky schools in decline are potentially high performers in absolute terms, and one of the four schools in the sample is one of those schools, while Maryland reconstitution-eligible schools are for the most part persistently low performers serving a decidedly disadvantaged group of students.

Educational Background

The questionnaire asked respondents about their academic degree and certification. Concomitant with higher stability and continuity, all Kentucky teachers in the sample possessed at least a B.A.; 71 percent reported having at least an M.A. Only 7 percent of the Kentucky sample were reportedly not certified or not fully certified for the field they taught. Overall, formal education does not seem to be a great cause of concern for the four Kentucky schools. It is possible, however, that the number of uncertified teachers are underreported if we keep in mind non-respondents and the relatively high number of educators in leadership positions that responded to our survey.

In Maryland, 95 percent of respondents stated that they hold at least a B.A.; 51 percent had at least an M.A.; and five percent had not completed a B A.. With the exception of these five percent, most teachers met minimum academic requirements for a teaching career. The proportion of teachers uncertified or not fully certified for the field of their teaching was 31 percent. In the urban District A, 37 percent reported not being fully certified in their field, while that figure was 24 percent for the suburban District B. Most *not fully certified* respondents (73 percent) were within their first three years of teaching. Some of them may have entered teaching through alternative career paths. As in the case of Kentucky, not fully certified teachers may actually be underrepresented in our sample. Nonetheless, our Maryland sample appears to be much more strongly characterized by a group of young, inexperienced, and insufficiently prepared teachers than the Kentucky sample, which seems to be more stable, experienced and educated.

Sense of Preparedness

Shifting from objective to subjective indicators of teacher quality, we asked teachers to rate their sense of preparedness for their current teaching assignment. In both states, confidence abounded. In the Kentucky sample, most teachers felt adequately (34 percent) or very well prepared (60 percent). Only 6 percent of respondents conceded that they might lack preparation for the year's teaching assignment. The numbers in the Maryland sample were very similar: 61 percent of respondents felt very well prepared, and 30 percent felt at least adequately prepared. While this high sense of preparedness may come as no surprise for a teaching force that reported to be fully certified, as in the Kentucky sample, it is surprising for the Maryland sample. Certification for one's subjects or teaching areas appeared to be rather irrelevant for these not fully certified teachers: 42 percent of the "not fully certified" felt *very well prepared* for their current teaching assignment. Thus, overwhelmingly teachers professed to be well or adequately prepared for their teaching assignment even though some of them, particularly in the seven Maryland schools on probation, were fairly new to the profession, new in their school, and sometimes not fully certified in their field.

Table III.2 - Perceived Teacher Capacity

	Percent of Teachers Who Obtained High Scores*	
	Maryland	Kentucky
Preparedness	61	60
Professional characteristics		
Professional capacity	52	35
Caring	70	64
Efficacy	57	27
Effort		
Willingness to exert effort	76	79
Belief in effect of effort	72	71
Skills		
Perceived skills of self	71	59
Perceived skills of colleagues	44	62

* High scores are calculated as follows: percent "Very well" for *Preparedness*, "Strongly agree" or "Agree" for *Effort*, percent scoring upper third on the *Professional Capacity, Efficacy, Perceived Skills of Self, Perceived Skills of Colleagues* scales, and upper half on the *Caring* scale.

Professional Characteristics

To gain a sense of how teachers viewed themselves as professionals, we asked them to imagine that colleagues at the school were requested to characterize them. We gave them a list of thirty characteristics or traits from which they could choose appropriate descriptions of themselves. We extracted three factors from the responses to the thirty items with the help of principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. Two factors were used for the composition of scales. Based on Factor 1, we composed a *Professional Capacity* scale with seven items, and based on Factor 2 a *Caring* scale with three items. Internal reliability was high for both scales. A third factor *Needing Help*, consisting of only two items, was dropped from further analysis. ` III.1 shows what characteristics were used to compose the scales.

Box III.1 - Characteristics of Professionalism Scales

High Professional Capacity scale

- A leader, very knowledgeable, enthusiastic, effective, highly educated, exceptional, very professional.
  Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .79

Caring scale

- Warm, thoughtful, caring.
  Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .75

Teachers across the eleven schools on probation rated themselves highly as professionals. About half of respondents from Maryland and about a third from Kentucky rated themselves as exceptional, i.e. they believed that at least five of the seven traits of exceptional professionalism applied to them. With regard to caring, 48 percent of Kentucky and 49 percent of Maryland teachers believed that they were warm, caring, and thoughtful, i.e. all three traits of caring applied to them. By contrast, few teachers stated that they would be seen by their colleagues as "someone needing help" or "has a lot to learn." Responding teachers very infrequently selected these items. Contrary to the image of a failing or low-performing school that the label of probation may evoke, teachers testified in this questionnaire to their exceptional professional quality.

It is curious that the higher proportion of novice and uncertified teachers in Maryland were not reflected in lower ratings of professional capacity relative to respondents from Kentucky. Maryland teachers gave themselves higher marks than Kentucky teachers did. It is quite conceivable that with these subjective measures we tapped into attitudes that reflect broader cultural difference between younger and older teachers and perhaps urban and rural environments. It is also possible that these self-ratings were clouded by a defensive posture of these teachers who, probation label to the contrary, may communicate their worth to the public. We must therefore underscore that we are dealing here with subjective self-perceptions that cannot by themselves approximate objectively measurable quality. While more reliable indicators of quality would be desirable, these subjective measures may suffice when we try to explain reactions to probation that may be strongly influenced by actors' subjective sense of quality, rather than their objective possession of capacity and skill.

Efficacy

A key element of teacher quality is teachers' sense of efficacy, i.e. the degree to which teachers believe that their own efforts make a difference for the performance of their students (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Box III.2 shows which items in the questionnaire were used to compose the efficacy scale.

Box III.2 - Efficacy Scale

Efficacy scale

- If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated student.
- By trying a different teaching method, I can significantly affect a student's achievement.
- There is really very little I can do to insure that most of my students achieve at a high level (values of this item are reversed).
- Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I should be teaching them (values of this item are reversed).

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .71

A large percentage of teachers in both states considered themselves efficacious. Maryland teachers saw themselves as exceptionally efficacious. Fifty-seven percent of Maryland teachers from the seven schools thought of themselves as highly efficacious, while only 27 percent from the four Kentucky schools thought so. Type of school and seniority did not make much difference here.

Effort

Similar to efficacy, respondents testified to their extraordinary willingness to exert effort. Seventy-six percent of Maryland and 79 percent of Kentucky teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were "willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that usually expected of teachers." Elementary school teachers agreed more with this statement (82 percent) than middle school teachers (74 percent). The percentage (59 percent for the two states as a whole) of those who believed that "with more effort, teachers in this school could be much more effective with their students" was not quite as large as for willingness to put out effort, but it was still very high. Thus, despite high ratings many respondents gave themselves for professional capacity, they saw the possibility for improving their schools through increased effort on the part of teachers. The pattern in Kentucky was similar.

Skills

We asked teachers to rate their own skills and those of their colleagues at the school. We wanted to know specifically whether they considered their colleagues' or their own skills to be adequate to the performance expectations of the state. We developed two scales, *Personal Skills* and *Colleagues' Skills,* with two items each (Box III.3).

Box III.3 - Personal Skills and Colleagues' Skills Scales

Personal Skills scale

- I believe that I have the skills and knowledge needed for our school to meet the performance expectations of the state.
- I know how to teach so that students do well on the MSPAP/ KIRIS / CATS.

Colleagues' Skills scale

- My teaching colleagues have the knowledge and skills needed for our school to meet the performance expectations of the state.

The typical teacher at this school ranks near the top of the teaching profession in knowledge and skills.

The scale mean for both scales was very high. In the Kentucky sample, teachers thought as highly of themselves as they did of their colleagues. Maryland respondents held a high opinion of themselves while they were more doubtful of their colleagues' skills. But still one half of the whole sample believed that "the typical teacher at their school ranks near the top of the teaching profession in knowledge and skills." The more respondents perceived their colleagues as skillful, the less they believed in the effect of more effort. In other words, belief in the effect of increased effort was apparently stronger when teachers perceived their colleagues as inadequate. Also, teachers who had less than five years of teaching experience and those who were not fully certified tended to have less confidence both in their own and others' skills and knowledge.

In the interviews, it was common that teachers described themselves as highly motivated and effective. But their judgment of colleagues at their schools was less sanguine:

> We have a large group of teachers who are just counting years. Consequently, those aren't always the best for our children. I fight that every day on my own team even. Trying to encourage students and trying,

> and all they say is give them something to do, just give them something to do. That really bothers me. I just have really low tolerance for that. I fight that a lot. I think there's a lot of people that just get here and get so tired of dealing with the discipline problems and things that it takes over them as far as caring for the children. It becomes more of a hindrance and they don't always do what's best for all of the students. They just start seeing them all in that vein as opposed to those kids who could be good kids with some encouragement. ...You know, we've got a huge group that really cares and really wants our students to do well, and then we have the others who are just putting in their time. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

Summary

We described teachers' quality and sense of capacity by looking at objective and subjective indicators. In the four Kentucky schools on probation, teachers' preparation seemed solid and work experience fairly normally distributed. For about half, tenure at the school was fairly short. In the sample from the seven Maryland schools, a group of teachers stood out that was new to the profession, new to the school, and not fully certified. Yet in all eleven schools, large majorities of teachers consistently rated themselves as of high quality. They saw themselves as well prepared, highly effective and caring, with a strong sense of efficacy, with skills that match the challenge of accountability and high performance, and with the willingness to exert above-average effort. About half the respondents believed that increased effort on the part of teachers would contribute to their schools' improvement. Far from being tainted by their schools' designation as lacking or failing, these teachers expressed certainty about their professional quality and worth. Only a very small minority conceded in the anonymous survey that they might need help.

3. Explanation of Decline

"I would say the eyes of the state think we're not doing anything over here..... They really don't think we're doing our job."

When employers threaten their employees with sanctions for underperformance, they presume that insufficient organizational outcomes are largely the result of employees' performance deficits. Improvements are conceived as the result of employees searching for those deficits. Following this line of reasoning, when employees in such a situation analyze their shortcomings or failures, they would focus on elements of their work that can be internally influenced. Conversely, when employees receive negative performance evaluations from their employers, they may either reject such evaluations as invalid because in their "failure analysis" performance problems are caused by factors outside of their control, or they may deflect criticism by making excuses.

Teachers' primary tendency was to attribute the school's problems to external factors by translating the *school's* low scores into low *student* performance, though some, particularly administrators and instructional specialists, criticized teachers as well. An analytical stance expressed by this young African-American science teacher, however, was rare:

> ...the students, they are, how do I say this, they are lacking very poorly in terms of basic needs. These kids cannot read. They cannot write. I've never, I mean having always worked at inner city schools and having worked with high school kids, I mean, I've seen kids bad, but now that I'm in the middle school, one of the things I used to say was, in the high school I used to say, what the hell are they doing in the middle schools. Now I'm in the middle school and I'm like, what are they doing in the elementary schools? And I don't know where it begins, but I have a problem. And I don't know if it's the kids, I don't know if it's the school or if it's just this generation. It really bothers me to see my brothers and sisters don't give a damn about schools, and I don't know how you change that. I don't know

> how you change that. So that's been my perception right now. (A-10; seventh grade science)

In the view of a majority of interviewees, challenging living circumstances of the students, poverty, unstable families, drugs, high student mobility, and the like were paramount explanations for the school's decline:

> I don't think it is, honestly I don't think it's the teaching as much as it is the children. (KY 10-14; first grade)
>
> I have to state that poverty is a great unequalizer in this, but I've never looked at poverty as an excuse.... to not perform, because I come from poverty myself, and the expectation was always for us to perform.... So, that doesn't become the excuse for it. But nonetheless, you cannot overlook its pervasive impact on the learning process. (E-7; principal, elementary school)
>
> We have many, many students in our building who are coming from, and I know this should not be a deterrent, because for many it isn't, but many of them are coming from one-family homes that are living in apartment complexes. Many of these students have not had the advantages that many other students around our county have had. In my teaching, I find that they have very, very little prior knowledge, which makes things more difficult for me. I find myself doing much, much more remedial work, and trying to teach what my curriculum asks me to do, where I have to go back, way back. I mean, I have many, many students who have problems in situating the continents. I have many, many students who still get a continent and a country and a state mixed up.... I don't know. We're getting, yes I do know. Each year, we're getting more and more kids who bring to us less and less skills. (A-7; seventh grade social studies)
>
> I think we also honestly have to look at the children as they enter the school and in just the nine years that I've been in elementary I can see a marked decline in the readiness of the children when they come to us even though they've been in Head Start. It's, it's very noticeable that the children that we get are just every year more disadvantaged, less mature ready to learn.... A lot of it is socioeconomic. A lot of it has to do with single parents who are very young. A lot of our children do not even live with either parent. (KY 10-06)

Parents were often mentioned as not being constructive participants in their children's education.

> I think it's, it's different parts that play a part in their performance. I think the teachers are doing our part. We are doing our part. Really, I think the biggest part is missing for a lot of them, like I said, that's the home. That home, a lot of them, you know, if they had the guidance from the parents to say, "You're gonna do this. You have to do this, because, you know, I want you to succeed, and I love you, care for you," and that type of thing. A lot of them want to perform better, but for them, they come here and they don't do well on the MSPAP scores, MSPAP test. They go home, and their parents are not there, and if some of them are there, they don't care if they've done well or whatever. It's not going to matter to them. They don't care. What *you* think is strange, "I've known you for four months, you know. Who cares what you think. My mother doesn't care. I've known her all my life." (A-11; health educator, middle school)

A mathematics teacher echoed a recurring complaint that low parental involvement indicates parents' lack of interest in education:

> I'm not exactly sure what is, but there should be more parents involved with what their students are doing. I have only out of one hundred thirty some odd children, I have about eight parents who come in to talk to me about their child's report card and come to get their child's report card. So that's one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty students whose parents really don't care whether or not they see their child's report card. So these parents don't care what their child is getting in school, and therefore the child really doesn't care. They're not being punished when they're doing poorly, and they're not being motivated to do better. (D-21; sixth grade mathematics)

In one inner-city elementary school (School F), the school-wide analysis of reasons for decline resulted in the identification of two problems:

> The staff was clear in their recognition that there are two problems that we have, and there are two things, two reasons why we can't achieve. First, children are disruptive and can't focus, and secondly, children are behind. (F-8)

In light of the numerous perceived external causes for poor student performance, it was especially irritating for teachers that, in both elementary and middle school, teachers alone carry the burden of accountability, since they are the only ones for whom the tests are high-stakes. Thus in their eyes, school accountability was not a shared responsibility among all participants of the educational process. This diminished the fairness of the accountability system as it exposed teachers to socially irresponsible behavior of families without recourse, for example when the school "desperately" tried to compel parents to send their children to school on testing days in order to avoid the penalty for no-shows.

> The accountability shouldn't lie on the teacher and the school. It's everybody's responsibility. The adage that it takes a village to raise a child is true, you know, and what that accountability thing says to me is you only hold a few villagers, instead of the entire village for the accountability. (E-8)

Since the accountability systems in both states measure the school's progress by comparing the average performance of different cohorts of students from year to year, teachers frequently explained their school's decline with the changing "personality," preparedness, or chemistry of the yearly cohorts:

> Okay, now behavior-wise, this group seems to be better behavior-wise than the group last year. But the group last year was smarter, so I don't know if it's, if it's coming from the elementary schools or if it's just society or timing. I don't know...what it is. But, I ...I really can't say. Like I said, I've only been here a few years. (B-6; sixth grade social studies)

And her colleagues confirmed:

> Absolutely. There are years when the children just seem to catch it and move real quickly, and other years when they're, the students are not as motivated. (B-7; sixth grade mathematics)

Quite a number of schools in our sample had experienced recent changes in their catchment area or were negatively impacted by magnet schools or other schools competing for talented students. In four of the eleven schools, the sentiment was pervasive among teachers and administrators that districts abused them as "dumping grounds" for undesirable special education or educationally less motivated students, or that rezoning had changed the composition of the student body for the worse. Since neither of the two state accountability systems includes value-added measures or educational load comparisons in their designs, the schools received no credit for their added challenges:

> At that time, I think it was our population change because we did.... There was a redistricting that went on here and we seem to draw from the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder and so we pulled in more kids from the lower end, and then the students that we had that came from the higher socioeconomic homes, those parents were upset that their kids were going to be in the same status with the lower status, and then ____County decided there was going to be magnet schools, and parents had the option of putting their kids into magnet schools, so these parents took their students which were our higher students and self-motivating students, took them out, put them in magnet schools. They took the cream of the crop away from us and put them elsewhere, so we were left with the rest of the group, so to speak. So with that population, to me, that's why our scores went down. Because we have nobody at the top to bring the scores up. (KY 20-02; librarian, middle school)

Some rejected the test per se as an ill-conceived diagnostic tool. For them the test was constructed for much higher levels of proficiency than they could accomplish with their students. Observing their students failing made them doubt the test per se:

> I don't take personal responsibility. But, I just saw how the students struggled when it came time to take the test. Things that had been taught to them, they didn't, you know, keep with them in their minds, when it came time for the test. You could see areas that hadn't been taught. So, it was just, you can see their frustration. And, really what, why I knew their scores were going to go down, was because of the time limits they had set. It was so structured on time, that they might only have four or five minutes to get this task done. Well some kids that are slow readers, it might take them that much time, just to read and understand and then they wouldn't

> have enough time to write an answer. And I had kids who were saying, "You know, I really want to do this, but I don't have enough time."…. You can't even give them a nudge in the right direction, it's frustrating for a teacher also...to sit there for three hours and watch them struggle and get upset. Some kids cry, 'cause they can't do it. You know, it's frustrating, and it's hard. (C-7; fifth grade)

> Well, you know, it's a lot of factors that go into a kid not being able to perform on a task, you know. I've always thought they just might not be good test-takers. There's a lot of brilliant people that don't test well. That might not be across the board, but I think you can always factor that in, there're just people that don't test well. (E-8)

> I know what, when I handed that test to my students, what they can and can't do. I guess from that standpoint I'm prepared that the test results aren't going to be really strong just from what I know that my students can do. Some of those things are way above anything they could potentially give any response on. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

Attributing reasons for the school's decline to external causes was the pervasive view, but teachers in the eleven schools also looked at themselves, their colleagues, their leaders, and the situation at their schools. But internal attributions were often seen as influenced by, or rationalized with, externally caused conditions which teachers could not control:

> Their social standings,…maybe one parent at home or being raised by a grandmother, free and reduced lunches changes, the other statistics change, maybe that's what, things that we can't affect as much as teachers that's changing the scores. And not us…. I think that's some of it. I also think it's high turnover in the schools. Teachers coming and going…. I would say two of the teachers that came in were incompetent….Yes, and it was hard to get them out, and the kids were not working. The following year was when the test scores dropped. After having left that situation. (B-1; seventh grade English)

> It's very hard, and I think what happens is, because it's been hard, we get tired and sometimes when we get tired, we tend to get careless about how we deal with the teaching of the students, and I think that's why, again, the principal gives us the little motivators along the way to help get us into the groove. I also think that we may.... We made the transitional phase until we became hit over the head so to speak as a school in decline.Then it was like, you know, what are the outside people doing to help us try to make

> this transition? You just kind of get bogged down with feeling helpless about that transition. I think that our staff here is very capable of handling that transition and dealing with those kids, but we get tired of that sometimes from year to year, and with this redistricting thing, we would sometimes wish, and we do wish, that "Why can't we be districted so that we get a wider variety of kids instead of the lower end of the totem pole and all the special ed kids?" (KY 20-02; librarian)

> Maybe some of the reasons could be because the teachers are not taking full advantage of every single thing that is available to us, all the different techniques. Now, that is a fault of my own. However, I contribute some of that to lack of planning time, as far as being able to get anything. And also the accessibility of things in the school. (A-2; eighth grade science)

Many schools on probation, particularly in Maryland, suffer from high teacher turnover and a skewed age distribution among faculty, both factors resulting in enormous training and retraining needs and inadequacies. An outspoken mathematics teacher in School A described this typical problem in the following way:

> I also know this, that this school, for the four years that I have been here, our staff, is either as I said, has been like thirteen to twenty years veterans or first year teacher. We have not been able to retain those teachers who are right in that middle group. And needless to say, these are the people who need inservicing most. The old staff members and the new ones. The old ones because some of them become what I call.... 'Rote Scholars.'.... They don't want to do anything different. "We've always done it that way, and it's always worked, and this is how we want to do it." And, of course, the young teachers need it just because they are that, because they are new teachers. So it's the staff. (A-6; eighth grade mathematics teacher)

Teacher turnover and the large number of young teachers in the Maryland schools reportedly made it very hard for these schools to ever make headways on the tests:

> Right now I just don't, I really don't see it, I think with, you have a lot of new teachers that come into the school over and over again, and the first thing that they're trying to deal with is classroom management as far as trying to control the class, how they're going to control the class, and then if they get past that, then they're trying to figure out what lessons are they going to do. So it might come to around this time of year that they finally maybe start adapting their lessons geared towards MSPAP and so, that's

> why I think you have a high turnover rate. Hopefully that will stabilize but it's hard, it's really hard to say because you're in a situation where there's a shortage of teachers, and a lot of teachers that do come here aren't certified, and they've taken the job to hold them over until they really get what they want or they do stay and become certified quickly, and they move on because of the shortage of teachers everywhere, so they move on to schools that they feel are safer or a better climate for teaching. (D-16; sixth grade science)

While interviewees were loath to criticize themselves or their colleagues, they were more forthcoming in complaining about feeder schools or other schools their students attended previously:

> Well now, coming in and seeing that they were low, the only way you could explain it is that the kids aren't being taught. They were not being taught. Those areas, and social studies since that's mine, those areas that needed to be emphasized have not been emphasized. The kids are not able to write well. MSPAP talks about, a big part of it is writing, and being able to analyze and interpret information. These kids, a lot of them, don't know how to do that. A lot of them don't know how to work successfully in collaborative groups. (A-8; eighth grade social studies)

The most commonly cited internal explanation of decline in all eleven schools was lack of student discipline. This problem was partly blamed on the students themselves, but teachers also blamed lax school administration, ill-conceived laws and regulations, as well as the presence of large numbers of novice teachers at their sites:

> If you stick around long enough, you'll find out that this school in particular…is out of control. ….Nothing personal to administration but, but they're new…. and this kind of school, this kind of atmosphere, these kind of students need structure. (A-20; eighth grade science).
>
> I could understand [the decline]…. I really didn't have to explain it to myself. If you've been working around here long enough, you know what the problem is. It's discipline. It's always been discipline. (KY 40-07; eighth grade social studies)

In less frequent instances, interviewees pointed the finger directly at teachers in their schools. In most cases these interviewees were administrators or teachers with special assignments who were more removed from the classroom or had more of an overview across the school as a whole. A new assistant principal in one Maryland middle school complained:

> I just know that they are a few things that I fear, of course, when you hear people just, little hearsay, things such as a lot of people take off. I'm just trying to touch base with some things, a lot of people take off where they would never think of doing that with the old principal. Teachers really are taking off. Gosh, every month teachers are off. Whereas last year, some teachers were hardly absent from what I understand. But they just feel nothing's being really asked of them or required of them so they have a sort of lakadaisical attitude. "Well, if I'm not there, they'll just get me a sub." Because I do handle subs as well which drives me crazy but.... Both those things strike me strange though.... There are an awful lot of teachers here that go out on worker's comp. Whether it's bogus or not, I can't say. I have my personal opinion and feelings on that but more, and with a school of just fifty teachers, somebody's always getting injured and sort of milking the system. (A-4; vice principal).

Miss K., who visited teachers' classrooms on a regular basis as an instructional specialist in the same school, was unequivocal in her diagnosis:

> (Miss K. laughs). Instruction does not mirror the test.... It's short and simple for me. Like you still have math teachers who are teaching division of fractions, they're teaching lining up decimal points. When they get to the test they're given a calculator sometimes for the first time that will do all of those things for them. And we spent nine months teaching that. In English we're teaching "Give me a noun. Give me a verb. This is an adjective." In isolation. We get to the test and no one asks, "Is this a noun or is this a verb?" That's not on the test. It's not asked in that format. (A-9; instructional specialist, middle school)

A reading specialist in one of the Kentucky middle schools argued in the same vein:

> I think the testing is on things that our children are not taught. We have some staff that thinks, "Oh, well, these are the things that I think are important, and I'm going to teach that regardless of what the state tells me

> to teach, and I'll teach it until they know it whether it's week one or week 40 in the year, we'll still be working on it. I think some people, those old slippers that you wear that are really comfortable, so why change? So I think part of it is within the classroom. I think part of it is with our children and part of it is with our administration. I think the district needs to take some responsibility. Where our boundary lines are set up, and I'm sure you've heard this... We need some stronger students who are good examples. I believe that it could help make a difference. (KY 40-14, reading specialist, middle school)

What follows are several accounts from teachers and administrators from one school in which they vividly communicate their ideas as to why their schools declined. The reasons are the familiar ones discussed so far. But how teachers and administrators make connections among them, how they intertwine external and internal factors, and how they expound on themes that make them passionate opens a window into people's thinking in these schools on probation.

The principal of School C, an elementary school located at the edge of a large city in the state of Maryland described his challenges this way:

> Well, last school year, I had a feeling because of the problems that we were having with staffing, the personnel, and we have a tremendous mobility rate for children in this building. Then there was a behavior problem that was escalating.... We had in 1996-97 we had 11 classes in the temporaries. In other words half of our school system was on the outside. I mean half of this school was on the outside. All fourth and fifth graders and third graders were on the outside of this building. There was a lot of time lost coming back and forth. And then we had three or four teachers dropping out in the middle of the year. And they were in third grade and fifth grade. And all the third grade teachers were brand-new. We had a strong team set up the year our scores jumped up. We lost all the players on that team.... I had to start all over from scratch with a bunch of new people, and it didn't work. It just didn't work. When they come out of universities now, they aren't prepared for what they have to meet. (C-1)

Teachers in the school described how this situation looked from their vantage point:

> Well, I really feel that last year, when the school was declined, we had a total of four new teachers to third grade, and that was one of the, I think, biggest decline. These teachers, some of these teachers were new to [the district], they were first-year teachers.... One teacher in particular moved three times, from upstairs to the science lab, I'm sorry, to the math lab, and then to her room when they brought a new portable building. So, they moved the classrooms at least two or three times, so, I think her class started out...she started out having good classroom management, but at some point she just lost it, with the movement. Fifth grade students, I think some of the same problems. The fact that they were outside and we had so many students coming in...We had a total of four classes of fifth grade outside. We had four classes for fourth graders outside. We had three classes of third graders outside. We had a total of eleven classes outside. The class had to come in to use the restroom, which the teachers brought their whole class, took about fifteen minutes... They had to come in the building for lunch. They came in for P.E. They walked around the building to the music class. They came and took computer lab, from media. So, with being outside they probably lost, I would say maybe thirty full minutes of instruction with the movement. So, I think that was, I would say that was one of our biggest problems, dealing with the new teachers, the changing thing...coming in to have to wait in line. (C-4; media specialist, elementary school)

Miss P.'s account of the ups and downs of her individual classroom adds to this picture:

> Right. There's a lot of, like, the kids move. Like, I had only ended up with, out of a class of twenty-five last year, when I started, like, between twenty-three and twenty-five, I only ended up with like eleven original kids. Ok, I had lost, I mean, you constantly are losing students, so you're starting over, and you're trying to build, and you have to build that relationship with them. You have to, you know, if they came from out of state, they weren't used to, you know, the kind of structure and the teaching that went into MSPAP. So, that was hard, and then you know, you had discipline problems with some kids. My class was excellent last year, I do have to say, until, you know, certain people, kids moved from class to class. You know, if they have a discipline problem, they might move them from one class to another class. That put a little bit of a disruption in my class for about three months. So, then it's hard to get them back on track after you lose that. You know, that disruptive person is put into your class,... and they don't appreciate it, ok, your students that you've had all year. And then, they see this person getting away with the same constant behavior, OK. Nothing's getting done, and then they start

> acting that way because they feel, well, you know, "That person can do that, and they're not going to get in trouble, then I'm going to do that too." So, that, you know, really put a strain on, you know, the structure in my classroom. But after he left, that was like February, you know, we had like the end of February, we had two months to really get back on track. So, you know, a disruption that took out three months, 'cause this child disrupted every day... so that was hard. But, you know, the kids, too, they didn't take things as serious as they should have. They don't, you know, not all of them, I mean, because some of them worked really, really hard. And, just the test is very frustrating for them, especially if they're not on grade level for reading. If you're not on a specific grade level, the test is extremely difficult. They couldn't get it done. They didn't get enough time. The test doesn't give them enough time to actually get their thoughts down on paper. Some kids, you know, they have to really sit there and think about their answer, and you know, if you only have so much time to get one task done, you have six or seven questions to do with three or four parts, you're not going to have enough time. (C-9; fifth grade)

The math specialist of the school related this observation:

> Unfortunately, this is what I've seen every single year. Instead of starting in September, it's like everybody waits until April to start handing out a bunch of tests and thinking you're going to get it. No, we should have started back in September. (C-10)

The guidance counselor of the school shared his perspective:

> And I feel that some of those reasons are, again, a lot of kids here probably could be eligible for certain services, special services, but we have just so many of them, so many students that probably need services, it's hard to put everyone on the spot, when you only have two ARD meetings per month for half the day, ok. Now, some places, I mean, that will work. But, for our school, it's not beneficial. It's not effective at all. Another reason why our scores probably declined is because of, we have some discipline problems here. I think if you stick around long enough, you'll observe that we have discipline problems also. Another reason why is a lot of our kids are two years below grade level. Another variable is we haven't even found a way to work together more as a team. And I'm not talking about together as a team of teachers and the principal need to work together as a team. I'm talking about as far as working together more as a system where you also include those parents. (C-2)

Teachers leaving in large numbers, whole teams to be reconstructed from scratch from year to year, overcrowding, lack of material resources, serious logistical problems, enormously needy students, discipline problems, lack of special services, lost instructional time, struggling teachers, and a test that is extremely demanding and insufficiently attended to – these are School C's challenges and explanations for decline. A similar list could be compiled for almost all of the eleven schools, though each school highlighted different factors and mentioned specifically local problems. For example, principal turnover was noted as having detrimental effects on this small town elementary school in Kentucky: "When we don't have someone within our building to hold us strictly accountable, no matter how good we are, we slack, and I guess that's human nature, and that's what I've seen" (KY 10-04).

As mentioned before, one of the Kentucky schools in the sample is a school with a high absolute performance level that had entered decline status because it didn't meet its expected growth target. This school's analysis of decline was quite distinct from those of the other 10 schools:

> We were just living under the impression back then that while we, you could be a reward school but the way the formula worked you would eventually end up being a school in decline or crisis.... So, from that standpoint we weren't surprised but that we eventually ended up that way. From the standpoint of the classes of children we had seen coming through, the first class of children that came through here with KERA had several school-of-choice children in it, several grades of bright children in it, and really the first two or three or four groups that came through we were doing all kinds of projects and in the news all the time, and so a lot of parents were applying for their kids to come here, and so we were pulling in some of those, and then for whatever reason burnout...you know you get something so gung-ho for three or four years and then all of sudden you've given all you can give for a little while, and you have to just kind of sit down and tend to the regular classroom duties for a while. And

> so we weren't doing all those real fancy get-on-the-news programs for a while and because of that most of the kids that were coming here were..... I think the first three or four years of KERA; the first three or four years that we were doing that, a lot of school-of-choice children were teachers' kids, doctors' kids and then after that most of the school-of-choice children were here because it was convenient to drop them off.... on the way out to the industrial park. (KY 30-03)

A number of teachers and administrators found themselves at a loss to explain what led to the fluctuations in test scores that many schools experienced in the past. As we saw, many were convinced that the school had worked hard continuously, yet they did not see this reflected in the test scores. As a result, they either discounted the reliability of the test or expressed helplessness as to what strategies might have the desired effects on the scores. Rather than being in control of the situation, they felt exposed to the vagaries of a system whose fairness they doubted, such as teachers in School B:

> It was a fluke that they [the test scores] even dropped and they, they just jumped all over [School B]. Somebody up there I think had it in for [School B]. (B-18; seventh grade social studies)

> That was a very fluky year because prior to that we had only been making consistent gains, but in 1997 there was a drastic drop, and then we came back the year after and doubled that and then have held that. So we don't really know. If we did know, we'd be, you know, in a much better position. It was the "drasticness" of the drop that led to us being named recon-eligible, it wasn't the number, it was the spread, because now they are talking in terms of a three percent drop or a six percent drop being significant. I mean we did more than a six percent drop that year. But what is interesting is that we don't know how to get off the list, we don't know what the magic criteria is because the year after that, we doubled our scores, but that hasn't meant anything to anyone. We thought, maybe, we wouldn't be reconstitution-eligible any more, but we haven't heard anything. (B-20; instructional coordinator)

Conversely, the experience of swift transition from reward to probation status was a confounding experience in at least seven of the eleven schools, a phenomenon that

Kentucky educators commonly took more issue with. It made teachers conclude that overall their school was not doing too badly:

> Because of the things I mentioned earlier, why I believe the school is in decline, it is not because four years ago, when, by the way, the school was in rewards… it was not because four years ago the teachers were excellent and now the teachers are dummies and they're doing everything wrong, which is kind of how it looks when we have to do all this special training and people come in and tell us things we already know and tell us we should be doing them in the classroom when we're already doing them. It's because the population changed. (KY 20-04; special education)

Principals, as well, were mystified by the test score fluctuations:

> When we first started with this, it looked like it was going up each year, then all of a sudden, it went down. I haven't been able to put my hands on why it went that way because when we first started, we were getting closer to, we were maybe three or four points off from the threshold. Then all of a sudden the bottom fell out, so I haven't figured that out. I want them to increase. (KY 40-05; principal)
>
> I honestly do not know. This is my first year working with the faculty and the students and the school. I don't know. I think the teachers worked just as hard this year as they did last year. Many of the same teachers are here this year as last year so I can't pinpoint that yet. I don't know. I am the sixth principal in six years at this school. So that in effect I'm sure that by itself has an effect on the performance of the school. As to how much, I have no idea, but I know that a change in administration every single year is not beneficial. Our test scores went up and down and up and down, and it went up and down almost equally going across. The only scores that continually declined were writing scores. (KY 10-01; principal)

But the incoming principal of the same school offered this explanation:

> The year the DE was here the scores were extremely high. The next year they weren't but because the scores that year, the biennium was up in the rewards level…. You know there was nothing put in to sustain this, and so it just fell as soon as the DE walked away. The program and the scores went down. (KY 10-12; incoming principal)

But the prevailing sentiment at the school was voiced by this first grade teacher:

> You know, Sir, I don't know. I don't think anybody works any less. I mean we have a hard working bunch of people and I mean everybody tries real hard. I really don't know. I mean I think maybe it has to do with the capability of the students. I mean I think that you get different groups of students through and I know that some students are higher achievers than others. I'm not, I don't know. I don't think it has to do with anybody working any less or with anybody not trying as hard because I think there are a bunch of hard working people at our school and you know we are kind of labeled out. (KY 10-21)

In summary, teachers in the eleven schools were fairly unanimous in attributing a large part of their schools' performance problems to external causes over which they had little or no control. But internal factors, that is, factors that could be influenced by the school, appeared in their failure analysis as well, though they were often described as externally determined in the last instance. We encountered very little reflection on interviewees' individual performance and contribution to the schools' problem. Perhaps a sixth grade teacher from a Maryland middle school summed up teachers' sentiment well:

> I guess I would for myself, I would tie it into maybe a three-part system. The teachers might play a role, the students definitely play a role, and then reinforcing the students, that's the parents. That's kind of like a trickle-down effect. (B-8)

We have seen so far that respondents from the eleven schools are widely aware of probation, though their knowledge lacks detail. Although some take the signal of probation to heart, many find a way to personally distance themselves from it. Teachers doubt the punitive character of probation, and they want to believe that the status entails additional support for the school. A few interviewees go as far as to accept the stigma as long as it procures resources. Overwhelmingly, teachers feel confident in their skill and capacity to teach according to the performance expectations of the accountability system.

Externally attributed causes for performance shortcomings prevail over reflection on one's own performance. Test score fluctuations leaves many ordinary classroom teachers and specialists dumbfounded and clueless. Thus, while most teachers in the study feel that they have the requisite skills to master the schools' performance challenges, they at the same time do not share the view that they are fundamentally at fault and responsible for performance lags.

4. The Meaning of the Accountability System

It is conceivable that despite doubts about personal liability and internal school attribution of decline, goals and standards of the accountability system motivate educators positively if they attach meaning to the system and the rewards it can bestow on them. Conversely, it is possible that they, rather than embracing accountability goals, reject these goals due to their perceived unfairness to the school, unrealistic scope in the face of student reality, and pedagogical "wrong-headedness." In both Kentucky and Maryland, the most weighty assessment tool within the accountability system is a performance-based test that stretches teachers to move beyond basic skill acquisition to higher order thinking skills. In the survey, we explored attitudes towards accountability with twenty-five items which were reduced to five factors that became the basis for five scales that measure attitudes towards accountability. The scales highlight various attitudinal aspects: (1) *Goal Importance* measures to what degree respondents consider high test scores and exit from probation personally compelling; (2) *Validity* explores whether teachers believe that the accountability system measures good teaching; (3) *(Un)realism* measures to what degree respondents judge these goals to be realistic given their situation at school; (4) *(Un)fairness* captures if teachers regard the accountability system as fair to their school, considering that, in many cases, schools on probation serve a particularly challenging population of traditionally disadvantaged students; and finally, (5) *Direction* explores whether performance expectations are clear and teachers feel guided in their practice by them (see Box III.4 for items used to compose each scale). The scales are anchored in qualitative interview data that further detail the themes that the constructs try to capture.

Goal Importance - "Well, it's kind of a prestige thing."

Overall, respondents attached importance to the performance goals of the accountability system. Figure III.2 shows that the majority of respondents attached medium or high importance to their state's performance goals. If we look at individual items, we find that 58 percent of the respondents from both states agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "it is very important for them personally that the school raises its performance scores." But that percentage was lower (40 percent) when we specifically asked about the schools' goals expressed in terms of the states' performance based assessment tools (MSPAP, KIRIS/CATS). Getting rid of the designation of probation, by contrast, was a very high concern for respondents. Only seven percent of them agreed with the statement that "it really doesn't make much difference to [them]" whether this school lost its probation designation. Teachers who are indifferent to probation tended to see themselves as less efficacious and less professional and tended to have less confidence in skills and knowledge of self and colleagues. The mean of the

Importance scale was significantly higher for teachers from Maryland compared to the surveyed teachers from the four Kentucky schools.

Interviewees attached importance to performance goals and assessments of the system primarily for external reasons. That is, their school was evaluated based on these criteria, no matter how valid they might look in the eyes of educators. When asked how important it was for them to increase their school's test scores, we received the following replies:

> On a scale of 1 to 10, probably a 10.... I just don't like... I've never been a failure at things that I've done. I don't like being at a school where every day in the paper they say we're failures. It's not a very good feeling when you have to tell someone where you work and they say, "Oh, that school. That's a bad school. What are you doing wrong?" When they don't really understand, so I would really like to see our scores come up so you don't feel bad about yourself every day. You can't help it. I'm a very positive person and I feel very good about what I do personally myself in my classroom, but the public doesn't see that unless you've had their child or they know you. They just see what's written in general. (KY 20-09; English)

> It's important because that's all the county sees, is the test scores. We have one of the most dynamic programs going on here, but if the scores are not saying that we can meet the standards, we're not doing anything. (B-12; health)

> I want to see our school look good to the district. I don't want our school to look so bad because we're not that bad. I mean, our scores might show it, but we're not that bad. (KY 40-02; eighth grade English)

> I don't teach to the test, but you kind of, in anything, especially education, you've got to teach to take some type of test, because basically that's what keeps the wheels running, that's what keeps the funding, and it determines what money the school gets, based on those scores. (B-8; special education)

> Well, evidently it must be pretty important or we wouldn't be spending all this money and time on it.... I guess it is important, that's what we are all working for. (KY 30-06; fourth grade)

> I think it's important in our community because sometimes outsiders don't understand the difficulties that we're working with and they may label us as "Oh, they're a school in decline," but they really don't understand how much work we put into it. (KY 20-01; home economics)

Though the external function of accountability and testing was more in the forefront of teachers' concern, performing well on the test had educational meaning as well. But teachers struggled with how to make the connection between externally imposed concerns and more internally meaningful functions of accountability. A number of interviewees discussed this connection as a split between the professional and personal, as these two educators did, one a middle school social studies teacher and the other an elementary school principal:

> My success is to have students achieve, that's the goal of the school. More than anything they need to achieve, and my personal goal would be to have them respect the idea of education and realize you can apply one thing to something else. So they could tie in education with their own lives.... Personally? No, [the test is not important.] But I know on a professional basis it has to, which is where I have to gear my lesson plans. I mean many things I do in class are geared towards the MSPAP. I don't necessarily agree with that, but I do work towards that. So in a sense, yes, I do see achievement as that, but it's not my own personal achievement, it's my professional sort of you have to do this thing. (G-2; social studies)

> To me personally, my thought on the tests and the whole process, it's not that important because I know what these kids are learning, and I think I know what we need to be teaching. But to me, professionally and to the staff, and for the image that it gives us it's very important, very important. (KY 30-01; principal elementary school)

Those that did consider the accountability goals as important, often intertwine concerns for adult reputation with educational goals for children:

> I just hadn't thought about why it is we need to improve the scores, but I guess besides trying to improve [our] school's image, which is definitely

> what we want to do, we need to help these students become better students and better citizens. (KY 20-02; media specialist)
>
> I think it's important. I mean, the district has a vision of where it wants to be, and we're all players on the team, and it's not fair to our students not to keep them a part of the whole game. So, I think it's important just because you have to live with the district, so you have to meet their standards, but the bottom line is still to keep the kids where they need to be. We want our kids to be competitive. We want our kids to have life skills. We have no choice. It's not a matter of meeting district standards even though that's important. It's just a matter of accomplishing what has to be accomplished. (KY 20-08; mathematics)
>
> Well, I think it's very important, but the reason is because for the children, you know. They need to improve. They need to be able to see that they can meet those goals themselves, and of course it's important to me as my profession because we're judged by that and everybody reads it in the paper and looks at you because of what your scores are. But I think that our children need to know that they can reach those goals. (KY 10-16; first grade)

For some interviewees, the accountability system provided challenging standards and focus, although this was not a majority sentiment:

> I think as teachers and counselors and administrators we have to look at what is MSPAP really judging, OK? It's achievement. And it's just going to give us a gauge of where our kids are at, then we have to go beyond that to say, "How is the best route to get them what they really need in order for them to be productive?"... But, I totally agree with MSPAP, even if it was another type of test, in another state. It's going to give you something to gauge for where kids are at. You need that in order to know that, "Look, we still need to improve. These kids, this certain cohort of kids needs to improve in these areas in order for them to be successful." Because if we ignore the MSPAP, because we're just intimidated by the words MSPAP, what it stands for, or who conducted this, we're going to continue to run the same dilemma because of our own biases. (C-2; guidance counselor)
>
> Well, because it's such a gauge for looking at the performance of the school, it has to be very important.... It's importance can't be denied. It does really, I think, push the curriculum along. But that's a framework. It's the way we see it, and we worked within the framework. There's got to be some gauge of what we're doing and how well we're doing it. If that

> is it, then it's of great importance, but it's built into the whole framework of what we do in reading, English, science, and math. (A-3)
>
> You know I just... My answer is twofold.... It's not about the numbers. Can we get the numbers up, can we get the numbers up. For me it's about...the work and the effort and the focus that we will get from having to bring the scores up, you know. (KY 30-04; fourth grade)

A few interviewees saw accountability goals primarily as motivators for students, such as this fourth grade teacher:

> I have got to instill here how important it is. And make the children want to learn, or help them want to learn. Give them that motivation to learn and to achieve. To do their best that they can be. I always push these children. (KY 30-02; fourth grade)

Though clearly in the minority, some took the goals of the accountability system very personally and judged themselves by its criteria. This approach was more widespread among administrators than teachers and more clearly articulated among educators from Kentucky:

> It's very important. It's not that I'm fearful that they'll do something, but it's very important for me to feel successful and for my staff and kids to feel successful. I feel as though the scores need to increase. I'm not fearful about it or anything, I just want my scores to increase. That's the only way that I would feel that we've been successful is if the scores did increase. (KY 40-05; principal)
>
> Very important, it's a sense of pride for me at this point, and it's a challenge. I'm implementing some changes next year that I think will be beneficial. I will be very disappointed if they're not. (KY 10-01; principal)

Fewer in numbers, teachers, as well, attached personal meaning to raising test scores:

> I think it's very important, just for my own self-esteem. I feel that if my kids do well on this test, then it makes me feel like I was a success this year, that the kids did learn something from me. I just think we feel better about our school, and the area is going to feel better about the school. I think it's very important. That's what we've been working for all year long. We put so much time and effort into it that it would almost be

> discouraging if we didn't go up. I feel like we did. I really truly do feel that way. (KY 40-01; mathematics and science)
>
> Very, very [important], it's kind of one of those things where you constantly think about it, never off your mind, and you want to reach the goals and feel like you… I mean, I feel like I constantly am trying to find ways to reach those goals, and it is very important to me, and I would not feel as successful if I didn't. (KY 10-13; third grade)
>
> I try so hard to teach them for it [the test] and the weeks before I try to drill things that I've taught. We made a big deal about the test, we gave them rewards if they would stay awake during the test and actually take it and get here on time and be here for the test and that kind of thing. I'm just thinking if we get the scores back and they haven't done well, it's going to be a real crushing blow to me because I invested a lot of myself into that test, and it isn't for a reward for the state to say, "Well done." It's because I'm thinking, "Well, this guy over here, he's good. I want him to do well. I want this girl to do well." It's more like I'm into the individual students and you're thinking… you're teaching them. They do well in class, they do well on your tests or your quizzes and you feel like you're teaching them. Then if they don't do well on the test, you're going to feel kind of like you're not doing it right or something. To me, the rewards or the non-rewards are not as important as the students themselves and whether they're doing well or not. (KY 40-08; eighth grade mathematics)

The effect of probation on students' self-esteem was a concern mostly brought up by teachers in the two Kentucky middle schools in the sample. These two schools felt (unjustly) paraded as low performers in their communities:

> It's important from the standpoint of a student's perspective…. I think it would be a really big boost to these kids to know that they were well thought of in the county. They know we absolutely fight with one other school to be the bottom of everything. Some of them have gotten the mindset that they're going to live up to that expectation. I think the increase in the score would do more for student morale than anything, just because I think children would perceive that, yes, what we do here is important and it does make a difference, and of course the rewards that come with that as far as monetary could be used for things that need to be done. Students could see those things and know that they had a part in that. I think it should be made a big issue of, if it ever happens that we get in rewards, that it isn't the teachers that do that, it's the kids that do that. We ultimately don't take the test. I have a real issue with teachers being

> rewarded for what your students actually do. Yes, we can teach all day long, but it's really their responsibility to show their product. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

While there were a few educators at the eleven schools for whom the accountability system was a very personal challenge, for many the importance of the system's performance goals was diminished because of doubts about the system's validity, realism, and fairness. As compared to the above cited interviewees, this sixth grade English teacher articulated the more prevalent view at her school:

> Well, it's important. That's what they're looking at. We're being judged like everybody else. Our kids will be told that they're not prepared if they're not meeting it, which they probably won't be because that's the guidelines that have been set. In some ways, it's not realistic, not for my kids. We need to have our own set of guidelines. Not what's going on all over the state. If that's the case, then [you].... make your playing field equal. (KY 40-11; sixth grade English)

In summary, there was a strong sentiment that the goals of the accountability system are important primarily because of the external reputation of teachers, students, and the school. But on a more personal note, some teachers also wanted to see the fruits of their labor expressed in rising scores.

Box III.4 - The Meaning of Accountability Scales

Goal Importance scale

- It really does not make much difference to me whether this school gets off the reconstitution-eligibility list/ the list of schools eligible for a Highly Skilled Educator (values are reversed).
- It is very important for me personally that the school raises performance scores.
- A high score on the MSPAP means a lot to me. / Achievement rewards on the state accountability system (KIRIS/CATS) means a lot to me.
- It says nothing about me personally as a teacher whether the school raises its performance score or not (values are reversed).

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .72

Validity scale

- The MSPAP / the state assessment (KIRIS/CATS) assesses all the things I find important for students to learn.
- A good teacher has nothing to fear from the MSPAP / the state accountability system (KIRIS/CATS).
- The MSPAP/ the state assessment (KIRIS/CATS) reflects just plain good teaching.

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .75

(Un)fairness scale

- For the most part, teachers are unfairly judged by the accountability system.
- I resent being judged based on the performance of other teachers on the basis of school-wide test scores.
- The accountability system is stacked against schools located in poor communities.
- I feel that I am working to my best ability and effort despite the low scores the school received.
- If somebody from the state or district thinks they can do a better job than teachers here, let them take over.

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .77

(Un)realism scale

- Our students are not behind because of the teachers they have, but because of the conditions under which they have to grow up.
- The performance expectations of the state are for the most part unrealistic.
- It is unrealistic to expect schools that serve poor neighborhoods to perform on the same level as schools in wealthy neighborhoods.
- The MSPAP / the state assessment (KIRIS/CATS) is unrealistic because too many tasks are too hard for our students.

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .73

Direction scale

- The accountability goals provide a focus for my teaching efforts.
- Accountability goals tell us what is important for the school to accomplish.
- Prior to actual testing, benchmarks and public release items gave me a pretty good idea of the content of the MSPAP / state assessments (KIRIS/CATS).
- I am not sure exactly what our students are expected to do on the MSPAP / the state assessments (KIRIS/CATS). (values are reversed).

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .60

Figure III.2 - Goal Importance

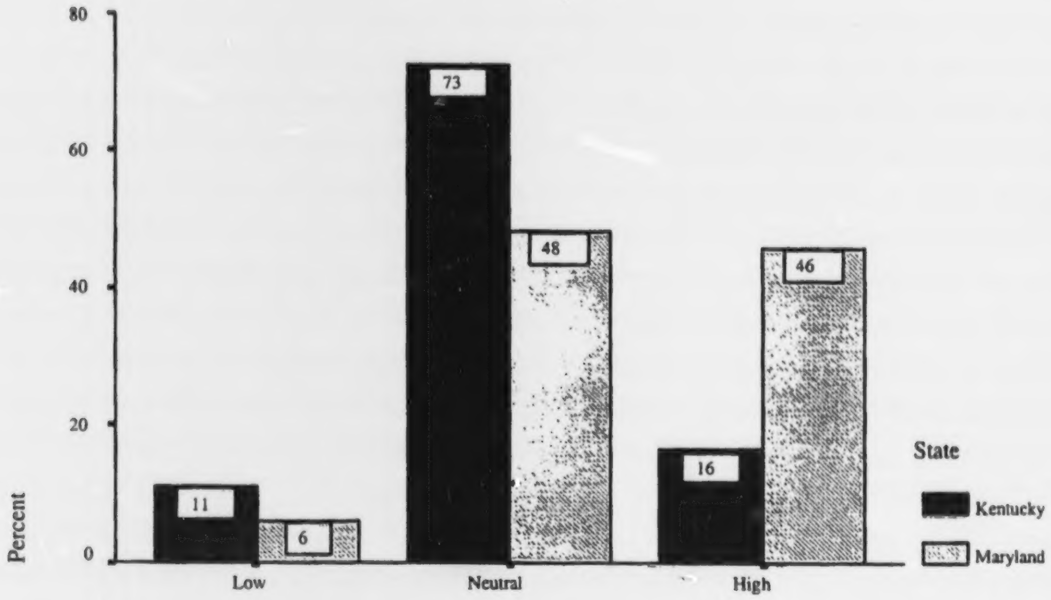


Figure III.3 - Validity

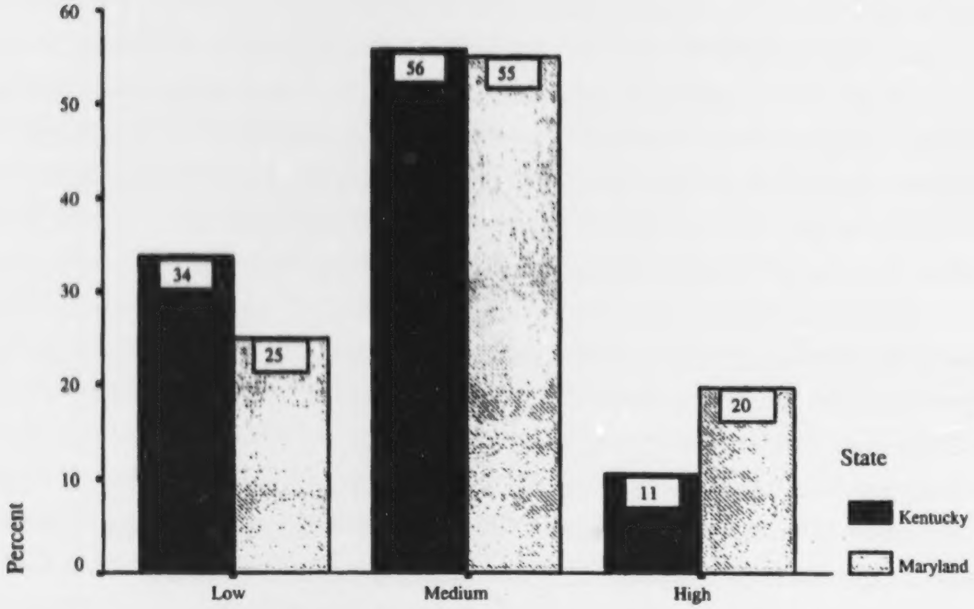


Figure III.4 - (Un)fairness

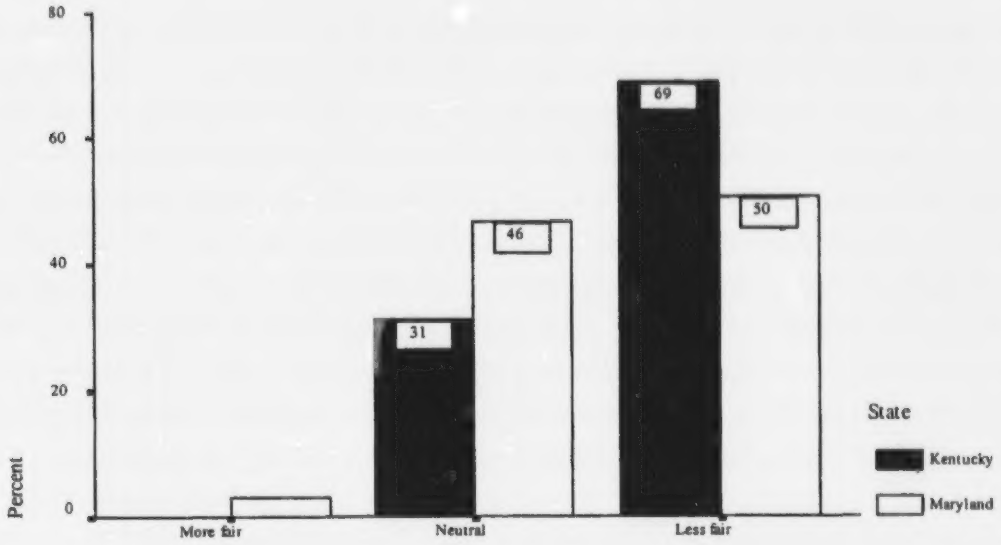


Figure III.5 – (Un)realism

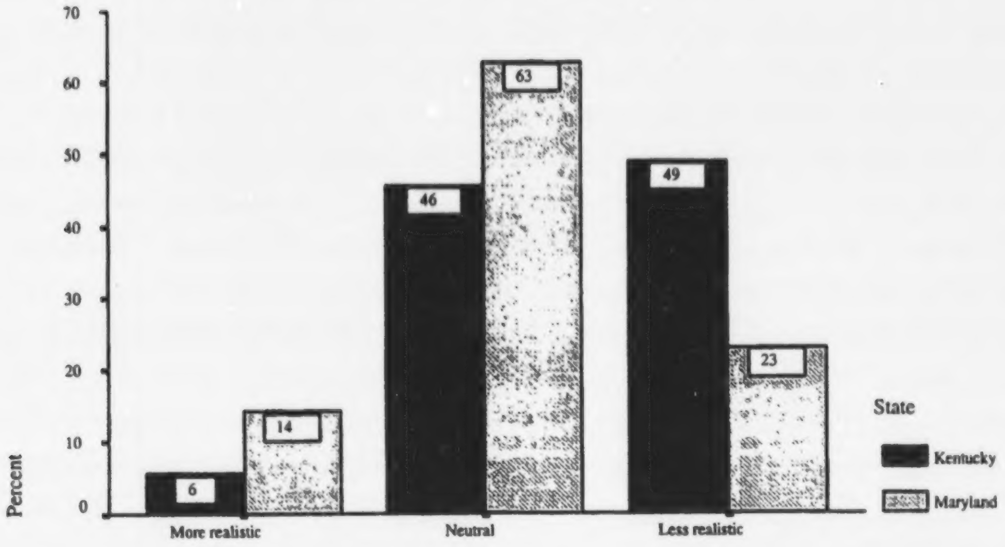
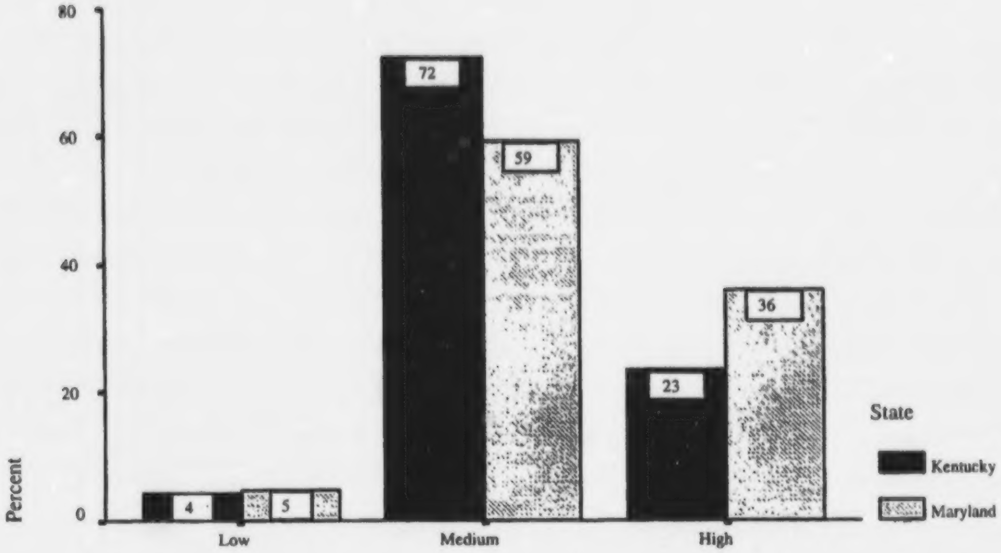


Figure III.6 - Direction



Validity

Both the Maryland and Kentucky accountability systems have as a centerpiece an ambitious test that, in its emphasis on writing and higher order thinking skills, challenges traditional teachers to change the instructional format of their class. The concept of validity captures to what degree respondents believe that the tests adequately assess the quality of their teaching. After all it is adults, rather than students, who receive performance scores from the accountability system. As we saw, educators may value raising test scores as a means to lift the externally induced stigma of probation. In this case, they would strive for higher test scores mainly to obtain an extrinsic reward. We assume that if they held the tests in high esteem, that is, if they also considered the tests as valid indicators of teaching quality and as tools of self-assessment, then attaining higher test scores would be more intrinsically motivated. Presumably, in the latter case it would more strongly connect to teachers' work, a connection that may be a necessity if teachers are to incorporate new pedagogical elements into their ingrained way of teaching.

Figure III.3 shows that the majority of teachers doubted the validity of the central assessment tools of the system, i.e. they doubted that test scores adequately represent quality teaching. A look at single items gives us a more nuanced picture. While 47 percent of respondents believed that "a good teacher need not fear the test," almost a third (31 percent) was not so sure about this. When we asked whether "the test (MSPAP, KIRIS/CATS) assesses all the things that [the teacher personally] find[s] important for students to learn," only 22 percent agreed. A similarly low percentage, that is only a fourth of the sample, was inclined to agree with the statement that "the test reflects just plain good teaching." These low percentages, as well as the high percentage of those who are uncertain as to whether they should fear the test despite the presumed quality of their teaching, suggest that teachers in the eleven schools on probation held a dim view of the validity of the states' central assessment tool. Not surprising then, performing highly in general terms was deemed important, as we saw in the previous section, but performing according to the terms of the accountability system found far less acceptance.

Self-Assessment

In the survey, we explored this issue further by inquiring what indicators teachers actually used when evaluating whether they have been successful in their teaching.

Respondents were given a list of eleven choices, among them various test scores, out of which they were to rank the top five indicators in order of importance. We subsequently rank-ordered these choices by frequency of selection and the weight given by the respondents.

Table III.3 - Indicators of Success in Your Own Teaching (Rank Order)

Maryland		Kentucky	
Rank		Rank	
1.	Lively participation of class (482)	1.	Answers from individual students (238)
2.	Students complete tasks (479)	2.	Students complete tasks (237)
3.	Answers from individual students (422)	3.	Lively participation of class (199)
4.	Positive comments from parents (336)	4.	Positive comments from parents (144)
5.	High test scores on teacher-made test (290)	5.	High test scores on teacher-made test (110)
6.	Affection from students (232)	6.	I just know it in my heart (78)
7.	Praise from colleagues (185)	7.	Praise from colleagues (76)
8.	Maryland Functional Tests scores (179)	7.	KIRIS/CATS scores (76)
9.	MSPAP scores (177)	8.	Praise from principal (59)
10.	Praise from principal (174)	9.	CTBS scores (49)
11.	I just know it in my heart (166)	10.	Affection from students (40)

The number in parentheses reflects both the number of respondents choosing each item and the weight given by them.

Table III.3 demonstrates that among teachers from both states, quantitative test scores rated very low in importance for teachers' sense of success. Rather, teachers in these schools concentrated on interpersonal relationships and the direct experience of the classroom as primary sources of feeling successful. Teachers in our sample were clearly not data-driven.

Our interviews suggested as much. For most interviewees, the system's quantitative performance goals and their own educational goals diverged. Teachers in all eleven schools said that preparing students for a productive life was their primary mission and that test scores were of secondary concern. The state tests were seen as irrelevant tools of assessing one's own teaching to the degree that they did not reflect this more encompassing mission. However, interviewees who purported this dichotomy between tests and "life lessons" rarely backed up their claim with detailed knowledge of the test and rarely examined to what degree their own teaching lived up to their ideals:

> It is not that important for me to increase the MSPAP scores. It is important for me that the kids leave here knowing more than what they did coming in.... I've never been a good test taker and I think that it's not a true measure of a person. A true measure of a person is a lifetime of experiences and a test will never measure that. (B-1; seventh grade English)

> I mean, I guess I'm sort of, I'm not anti-test, but I'm also... I mean, if I don't get something that should be addressed by MSPAP because I'm teaching my students an important life lesson, I'm sorry, but that life lesson [is more important], and maybe some way or somehow it will apply to MSPAP. (C-3; first grade)

Ignoring the high performance demands of the accountability system, teachers in both the Maryland and Kentucky schools commonly assessed their teaching based on their ability to accomplish learning increments of any size in their students.

> I feel that if I'm getting my teaching across and the child is improving, and that, you know, they can do things that they're supposed to do at the fifth grade level, then, you know the scores aren't as important to me.... I'm not, I mean, I'm going to have to worry about the test scores, but that's not the first thing in my mind. I guess it should be, but, you know, if I can teach my children how to write appropriate, you know, a correct sentence with punctuation, capitalization... how to figure out their math problem, how to be able to be critical thinkers... I mean, that to me is more important than the state test. (G-17)

> Just getting these kids to do their best and be able to write and to answer questions, that's my key priority. The state, I really, the test, I could care less about, to be honest with you, because, if they're not doing well, we need to find a way to make the student do well in class, so that they can get to that point. I'm not worried about the seventy percent or whatever

> satisfactory they need to be at. If they can improve five percent, 10 percent, they're improving, they're increasing. I don't expect all of the sudden to be from 10 percent all the way up to seventy. I know that's not going to happen. I want to see these kids being able to answer questions, do the higher level thinking questions, be able to have a conversation with someone, be able to get along with a classmate, without putting them down, or calling them names. (B-7)

> I mean, I would like all of my kids to be at the proficient level and that's an important goal for me, but I don't think... I don't know. I'm not as worried about, I guess, what the state is judging or what the state says should be the performance level. As long as I see improvement, as long as I see them knowing how to do the different skills we go over in language arts. (KY 20-03; English)

In this vein, 71 percent of respondents asserted in the survey that "rather than expecting a great improvement in school performance test scores, [they] concentrate on individual students' growth, no matter how small." Few items in the questionnaire find such high approval among teachers from the eleven probationary schools. Personalization prevailed over "data-drivenness," incrementalism over large-scale performance gains. Whether students grasped the curriculum taught by the teachers was a more meaningful criterion of one's effectiveness as a teacher than mastery of an external test:

> Honestly, because I think all standardized testing can be biased, so it is not that important to me if those scores aren't, by the year 2003, at a seventy, seventieth percentile, because, looking at the kids' background, and looking at what is written in that test and how it addresses them and the social issues that they have, they may not make that connection. So, they may not do well. But what is important to me is if my kids are learning the things that I'm teaching them, somehow they're able to connect it to the things that they're doing. (A-8; eighth grade social studies)

Although teachers' criteria for assessing the quality of their teaching differed from the criteria the accountability system applied to them, they did not for the most part reject accountability altogether. But even those who embraced the idea of accountability were doubtful of the specific criteria the system uses:

> But now, all of this accountability, which is necessary... if I had a child, I don't have children, but if I had a child, I'd want my teacher and principal to be accountable for when I see something wrong. And that's right, because that's my profession and that's the product... But... I can't be one hundred percent focused on it, you know? And I still consider myself a pretty good instructor, but I could be that much better if I were able to spend that time after school or before school dealing with some of the intangibles, I guess.... I'm more interested in each one of my students to be citizens. I am not at all interested in numbers, I do think numbers have their place, and I do believe that they can dictate where, not dictate, but show you where you are, however, to label the student because of those numbers, I think is unfair. (B-10; eighth grade special education)

Against the abstractness of summary scores and numbers, interviewees maintained the focus on the individual child as the quintessence of teaching and the source of reward and satisfaction:

> I don't feel like I need to know that they think that I'm doing the best at this and they're going to reward me for this or whatever. That's just not really important to me. I like to see my students succeed and I like to think that yes, I had something to do with that. Really, that's the only reason why we're here. The other people aren't that important. It's our students that we help make some achievements. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

Although questioning the wisdom of the tests and their validity in capturing good teaching, interviewees expressed willingness to comply with external pressures: "Yes, I'm in there every day, even though I don't agree and maybe I don't feel like, but I'm trying to give them what they need in order to pass those tests, to be prepared" (KY 40-11; sixth grade English). Yet, even for those who professed to comply faithfully with external performance demands, good teaching was not necessarily reflected in good test scores:

> I do teach to the standards that are set forth by the board and I try to meet each one of those standards.... If you're a good teacher you'll be successful in your classroom no matter what a standardized test says. If you're a good teacher, you're reaching the kids and you're developing their skills and you're making them prepared and ready to move on to the next challenge (KY 40-02; eighth grade English).

Feelings of alienation blended into willingness to comply, even for those teachers who felt that they had mastered the system's teaching standards. For them, internalizing external performance standards felt difficult in a system that seemingly worked against teachers rather than with them:

> For me, as a teacher? Honestly, if I could have decided...., it's more important for me to meet my students' needs. And that's not always easy because administration can be intolerable, and state and district can be a bit intolerable. I'm just a partner right now, in this stage of my career, because I don't, I don't see the care for the teachers. I just don't. I'm like, if you want to reach the kids, how 'bout reaching us? And we're the ones that have to get to them. You have to get to us. They can't get to students, state and district can't get to students. How? They're not here day to day.... That's the odd thing. People have visited my classroom and I've been congratulated, I've been rewarded, I've been applauded, you know. They raved about my classroom, and I'm like, why? And for the most part it is, because I know the inside. I know how to meet state and district standards. In other words, I know how to implement what they want. I know how to teach that way. I know how to make it look as if, you know, this is going on, and not to say that I'm not, but I know what's going on underneath as well, you know? My room is always set up the way it's supposed to be. My kids are writing in math. I have the work published, you know, every few weeks. I have my [daily lesson plans] ready. I just started performance tasks with them, so they're doing cooperative learning, so yes. It appears as if I'm meeting state standards, but in my heart of hearts, I cannot get a part of myself. I just don't feel it, because, it's, I'm doing it and I don't know how I'm doing it. It's like, ok, I must be running on fumes. (B-9; seventh grade mathematics)

On the other hand, there were those who saw the tests as integrated into their way of teaching and as indicators of good teaching. Often an avowed minority in their schools, they were more commonly staff with special assignments than ordinary classroom teachers.

> I think, you know a lot of people have problems with the test. I personally do not have any problems with the test. I think if you have been doing, if you have been teaching in that performance-assessive style all year long the tests should just feel an extension, it's another week we're doing the same thing. But if you've been teaching, "Open your books to page da da da," you know, you're going to be stressed. And administration is stressed because nobody has, when March hits or November when the reports come out, he gets stressed and from that point on you get yelled out for the rest of the year. Less stress, you know, take some preventative measures. Get rid of those textbooks for a while and start a little more hands-on things. You won't be as stressed. (B-10; mathematics specialist)

But the more prevailing view was that teachers were already doing "the best they can." As we saw earlier, most interviewees saw themselves as highly skillful, involved and committed to their students' success. However, their tendency to reject the tests as valid indicators of good teaching, bolstered by their propensity to externalize causes of decline, did not mean that they deflected all criticism or denied all blemish as far as their teaching was concerned. In the interviews, some teachers, though not the majority, judged themselves quite conscientiously at times, but the criteria used were different from the ones promulgated by the accountability agency, notwithstanding the groundswell of institutional legitimacy and authority on which the state could count in general principle. Conflicts with individual students, the inability to control one's classes or to compel students to work, not reaching one's lowest achieving students at all, or not making any progress despite repeated attempts of re-teaching were grounds for interviewees to doubt their effectiveness as teachers, in the face of which data-driven diagnostics paled in their significance. Stories from classrooms were related with a tinge of frustration, sometimes helplessness, or even victimization, for example in the case of the teachers in one Maryland school who used to pray together in the morning for strength to make it through the day. Particularly novice teachers, represented in large numbers in most Maryland schools on probation, were preoccupied with day-to-day survival in the classroom. But such preoccupation was not restricted to that group.

Student Needs

Basic skills, disciplined conduct, and citizenship, said to be needed by students to secure later employment, substantiated the goals of the educational process and the criteria to judge one's teaching effort. Modeling appropriate social behavior and work habits, and transmitting basic knowledge loomed as a task in the face of which concerns about insufficient test scores faded. Many teachers aspired to teaching higher order thinking skills and performance-based activities, prominently featured in the two state tests. But then they also sensed a gap between the test format and the needs of their students, presumably lying in the area of basic skill development and often ranging far below the grade level the test is geared to:

> I think I'm very good at what I do.... I think the concept of the test is very good, and you know, it's important because I want my students to have those skills. I think the state needs to, well, I think the state needs to realize that you have to take children where they are and you can't, you can't always work a miracle, you know. (A-2; eighth grade science).

Teachers repeatedly bemoaned that the MSPAP or the KIRIS/CATS tests were "too hard" for their students, leaving them at a loss as to how to bridge the gap. The instructional specialist in one of the inner-city elementary schools in Maryland described her dilemma this way: "What was so frustrating was, the state is telling us this, but yet, the teacher assessments of the children's performance is much different. So, you have your teachers saying, 'Well look, this is what I'm supposed to teach. This is what I taught. This is what the child can now do'" (F-8). Several teachers related stories that illustrated the perceived gap:

> One year I gave the test to a group of... fifth graders, and they were to read, it was a social studies aspect part of the test. And after reading, reading, going through the material, many students felt completely overwhelmed, "There's no way I can read all of this, form a graph and write about it in thirty minutes." And so, some of my brightest students put their heads on their desks and began to sob. (E-7)

The presumed misfit between student needs in the area of basic skills and the highly ambitious goals of the accountability system in the area of higher order thinking was discussed in both the Maryland and Kentucky interviews, but it was accentuated in the Maryland schools. Here, teachers felt confronted with the task of balancing perceived student learning needs with tests that emphasize both basic skills (Maryland Functional Tests, CTBS) and higher order thinking and social skills (MSPAP), the latter on a highly ambitious achievement level. One instructional specialist described the differences in mathematics this way:

> You are going to see the disconnect between the functional math score because when they take the functional test, they are literally working out problems and filling in what they think the answer is. The only way to get a math score off of MSPAP is if a child has written a paragraph about how he did a problem. No formulas or anything mathematical is scored for MSPAP. It is their writing about whatever they did. (B-20; instructional specialist)

The existence of the basic skills tests validated basic skills instruction in the eyes of many interviewees.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Rewards

The most frequently mentioned *raison d'etre* for teachers at school was the progress they were able to induce in individual students. Interacting with children, feeling needed, making a difference in somebody's life, and being stimulated by the non-routine nature of the work were the prime motivators for interviewed teachers to work at their schools:

> I really feel that these children need me and I have come to realize over the last 13 years that I need them a lot more than they do me. And I can shut out everything else except the children. There have been days I would have liked to have had a chute that shot me from my car right up the wall into my window and I wouldn't have had to see anybody else. [Laughter] Those days pass too. [Laughter] ...[It's] these children, the children.

The most frequent reward cited was the occasional appreciation teachers received from individual students:

> Sometimes I perceive myself as frustrated. Other times I perceive myself as involved, as [somebody who teaches] a good lesson. Then there are times that I see myself as I just want to give up and walk out.... I want to tell this little story. At Christmas time I was really feeling really low because I felt this doubt that all the behavior problems that I have in my class I'm not getting through and it doesn't seem right to me my children are passing my tests and my quizzes. My standards are kind of high and some of my kids can meet them and some of them cannot meet them. I don't get to work with the lower achievers like I want to and I felt really like I don't want to come back to school after Christmas. And so one of my students made me a card, a Christmas card and she kept telling me, Ms. M. make sure you read this, make sure you read this. And when I got home I took all these little letters, love letters I call them, and I was going to throw all of them away because I just felt like giving up at that time. And so I pulled hers out. I was going to throw it in the trash. And I said, "No, I have to read this." And so I told my husband, I said, "One of my students gave me this." And so I was opening it up and it said, she said, "Dear Ms. M., I wish you a Merry Christmas to you and your family and a Happy New Year and thank you very much for what you have taught me this year. I have learned a lot." And I stood in the middle of the floor and I started to cry and my husband gave me a hug and my daughter gave me a

> hug and my daughter, she was crying because of me crying. And that's what made me feel like at least somebody appreciates what I'm doing. (E-16)

A middle school teacher told a similarly moving story to explain what kept her in teaching:

> I like what I do. Because I like children, I like teaching. It's not for the money because I could think of other places I could be and it's a lot of my time. I just like what I do. I enjoy it. It's tough. But the rewards, see I'm based on a future rewards that some day these kids are going to find me walking down the mall and not being able to see very well, probably no teeth in my face but they're going to see, they're going to come up and tap me and say, "Do you remember me?" And I'm going to vaguely look at them and try. And I'm going to say, "What are you doing with your life?" "Oh, I'm a doctor or I'm a truck driver, I'm something." And I'll say, "Oh yes, I had a little piece of that." I had a little hand in shaping that. So, I guess that's really, that's the only reward you get. (G-5; science)

The pathos with which these stories were related betrays the infrequency of their occurrence and the dearth of these kinds of rewards in a teacher's life. Teachers in the eleven schools described their work as frustrating and devoid of external rewards and recognition, yet meaningful and stimulating:

> I don't think middle school teachers are given enough credit and recognition for the job that they do.... We are dealing with a very complicated age group and it is a hard job. I like working with young people. I've always liked working with young people. It's a challenge. It's never the same. You're always learning. Even though it's been years and years, it's just always changing. It's a challenge because I've been lucky enough to have been here so long I now have children of children. And it makes you feel good, it makes you feel good when they come back and they're in college or they get elected to the state senate as one of my students just did. (G-15; guidance counselor)

For some, this orientation towards the individual student was coupled with a sense of commitment to the community. Many of the interviewed teachers in Maryland are African-Americans who felt a sense of affiliation with the African-American communities that surround the selected RE schools. Some interviewees said they chose to dedicate themselves to this particularly needy group of at-risk students:

> Oh well, I've been in city schools and all the city schools I was in were like this and the reason I chose to be here was because if you look around, a lot of the other people don't want to be here and I know I can do it. So if I can do it and it's available for me, I should do it because who else will. So I enjoy the kids, I really do. (D-21; sixth grade mathematics)

> When I was in school, I didn't have anyone; I was a knucklehead just like the rest of them. And I didn't have anyone to kind of push me along. I was blessed to have my parents but I didn't have any teachers to push me along except for my coaches, my football coach, you know, and he couldn't do it all. So I didn't have a teacher that I could go to as a friend and just talk about something without having them judging me in a different standpoint. It's important to me because I feel like I have to be here because I never know when a student's going to come to school needing me for something. (D-24; dean of discipline)

Some teachers saw teaching in difficult circumstances as a religious calling, a theme that strongly surfaced in a number of Kentucky interviews:

> I guess for me it's a little bit different. I've felt like for this job, I don't know if this is going to be appropriate for your study, but I felt like God wanted me to be working with kids that had bigger needs than, you know, an average classroom and I prayed about and I had other offers to teach other places and I really felt like this would be somewhere that I could use my talents to hopefully make a difference in a bigger way than just a normal classroom because they are lacking in so many just basic ways of nurturing and things like that. The sole reason was a little different and I knew of the challenges and the things that were going to be a part of working here. Actually the rewards doesn't bother me but, I don't know, you hear things about.... I think I feel bad because I feel like we, our school kind of gets a negative rap a lot of times and you know you get so many negatives, and the thing is as teachers you don't get any kind of pats on the back from parents. The reason you're doing it is for the kids. You certainly don't get it from the community or the other schools because everybody has asked why would you want to be at _______School. In fact, I still have schools calling me for openings this year and they just can't believe I won't leave and come over there.... What's frustrating for me is not really that we are... necessarily missing out on the reward, in the fact that it's

> monetary; [it] really doesn't make a big difference to me but the... I feel like it's not fair to our kids. (KY 10-09; first grade)

Though the stressful aspects of work in these probationary schools was often recited, it was rare that teachers themselves disclosed feelings of personal disillusion, de-motivation, or ineffectiveness. This senior middle school language arts teacher was an exception:

> I don't know that there is something [that makes me come to work every day]. It's not like a burning desire to teach now. I don't think I have a reason. It's my job and I get up and I come because I'm a grown-up and I have a job. I used to have a passion a long time ago.(KY 20-12)

Thus, teachers in the interviews affirmed that theirs was a stressful and challenging, yet meaningful job, but they doubted that parents, the wider public, and the distant state authorities appreciated their toil. Teaching under the circumstances in which many probationary schools found themselves, many interviewees held, was short on external rewards. Being identified as on probation confirmed low external reward expectations:

> I think if you were one of those schools that knew [they] would be in rewards, then yes, you would be highly motivated. I think for us it's one more thing that we have to try to work on that we get smacked on the wrist that says, no, you didn't do a good job, when we know we've been teaching every day and we know that our students have made progress. So from that end I think that it's not motivational. I think there should be some kind of accountability. I don't disagree with that. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

Low salaries were mentioned as a symptom of society's disrespect for teaching, and particularly teaching in poor communities where salaries were even lower. These low salaries proved, interviewees argued, that teachers could not possibly be motivated by financial rewards: "I'm not here just to get a paycheck, teachers don't make that much money, you know, so it's not about the money. I'm not here to draw a paycheck. I'm here to help the school achieve its objectives" (B-2; Spanish). Even when interviewees deplored low salaries, they nevertheless stressed that they were not driven by money, like this Kentucky principal:

> Money is not the thing. It never has been for me, never. I was... I had a business one time when I was out of education and I was making a hundred dollars an hour, making furniture and I couldn't even motivate myself to give up a fishing trip to go work and make that money. I mean I'm telling you, money does not float my boat. (KY 10-12)

In summary, we saw earlier that educators in the eleven-school sample tended to value the achievement of accountability goals as means to lift the public stigma. We see here that educators, to large degree, reject the tests as valid indicators of teaching quality. Not having met the quantitative performance expectations of the system, they define performance success in different terms. Against the ambitious quantitative performance goals of the system, they hold the value of small incremental steps and personalization. Seeing themselves as the ones in close proximity to the students, they diagnose a misfit between external performance criteria and internal needs of their students. While some contend that the learning needs of their students call for basic skill development, others want to find a bridge to higher order thinking skills. But very few judge the tests to be the appropriate bridges. In the Maryland schools, basic skills and performance-based pedagogy was almost seen as a dichotomy.

Teachers' internal performance standards are not congruent with the external standards of the accountability agency. Many teachers' self-concept eschews the image of the score maximizer in favor of the image of an educator beholden to the intellectual and social growth of individual students and committed to the needs of the local community. Likewise, rewards are derived from encounters with individual students or learning groups and from psychic satisfaction, contrasted with the dearth of rewards that can be derived from the external environment of the school. In the eyes of many, probation proves this point. Thus, teachers are led away from the accountability system when actualizing their internal norms and standards of teaching. However, lifting the public stigma of failure is a strong incentive for teachers to comply with the test despite misgivings about the tests' validity.

Fairness

We have seen that the value teachers in the eleven-school sample attach to reaching the system's performance goals is primarily tied to concerns for status (i.e. the public stigma of failure) and less to the fulfillment of personal educational goals inherent in one's work. This is so, we showed in the previous section, because the majority of teachers tend to disregard the tests as valid indicators of work quality and student learning, given the specific social class context in which they teach. Here, we investigate teachers' beliefs about the fairness of the system. While the concept of validity hones in on the congruence between official and personal standards and measures, the concept of fairness emphasizes teachers' feelings about the rightfulness of the system's classifications, labels, and the judgments implied in them.

The degree of teacher discontent with the fairness of the system was striking (Figure III.4). On the *(Un)fairness* scale, teachers who thought that the accountability system is unfair strongly predominated. Their responses to some single items may illustrate this further. With regard to fairness, 61 percent of respondents felt "unfairly judged by the accountability system." Only nine percent disagreed with the notion that "the accountability system is stacked against poor schools," and 85 percent held against the system's accountability verdict that they are "working to [their] best ability and effort despite the low scores the school received." Clearly, the accountability system is not a fair judgment on teacher performance according to a great majority. Not surprisingly, teachers who possessed more confidence in their own skills and knowledge were more likely to think that the accountability system is unfair.

Likewise in the interviews, most interviewees rejected the verdict of probation as unfair, though they acknowledged the reality of low test scores and welcomed the resources given to the school. In general terms, they accepted being held accountable for performance. The state had the right to utilize an external test to measure school performance, and since the state chose to select these specific tests, it behooved teachers to pay attention to them.

> Well, there was no reaction [to reconstitution]... Anything that's for, to benefit of the students, and they feel that, the school, you know -- I trusted the state,... has looked into it further and felt that we needed to be reconstituted, then, you know, I'm in agreement with it. (G-11; mathematics teacher, middle school)

> If the label, if there's a criteria in place and if the school has not met with that set of criteria, then it's fair that the label be there.... (G-3; science seventh /eighth grade, department chair, school improvement team chair)

Knowing where one stands vis-a-vis the rest of the state was seen as a useful feature, but the accountability system as presently designed and carried out was seen as unfair to teachers in schools that educate such a large number of challenging students. Even though the schools' shortcomings in student performance were, at times shamefully, acknowledged, most teachers in these troubled schools rejected the view that the low test scores were a reflection on their own performance:

> My initial reaction was anger because I feel that they are picking on [School D] because we are in the neighborhood that we're in, because we're in the area of ____City. Initially when we were termed reconstitution-eligible, it was known that we were also in an area where the homicide rate was the highest of all the areas of [the] City. We're also in an area of a lot of unemployment, and we have a lot of parents who have substance abuse problems, so they did not look at all of the contributing factors to our low test scores and our low attendance. They just labeled us reconstitution-eligible. (D-23; curriculum specialist, elementary school)

> I feel that it was not fair… I have a problem with reconstitution in general because of the criteria that is used for middle schools. My understanding is that it was because our test scores failed. And I'm saying we can only work with what we get, and if we move a child three years in three years' time then that's progress…. I do fear for the school because I know that there are people here who are doing a good job, and I know that there are people who are doing good things, and I know that there are children who are making a lot of progress, and I don't feel that that part is being recognized. And, so, yes, I fear for the school. (G-15; guidance counselor, middle school)

> Research has shown that there's a direct correlation between low socioeconomic status and academic success, so it's not surprising. We have a very strong faculty in this building, and sometimes I feel like we get slighted for things that are really outside of our control because [of] the family structure for these kids. […] I would challenge our Board of Education to reconstitute our school. Take our kids out of here and take the entire faculty…. No, I don't fear what they might do because I don't necessarily agree with the process in the first place. I don't agree with having an accountability system in place, and this is just my own personal opinion. I don't agree with it because I don't think it's fair in the first place, the test. One group of students one year, then test another group of students the next year, and compare their scores. That's not valid. The state department can argue all they want to. (KY 40-02; eighth grade English)

> I kind of think that the comparisons done with that are a little bit unfair for us because I am familiar with a lot of the other schools in our district. I have children in this district that don't go to school here. Judging from what they get as far as home participation and attendance and all of that, that to me plays a big part in what our success can be. Those are things that some of us don't have any control over here. We can't make them come to school and if we don't get parents' support, then we're obviously not going to get that either. We're also getting kids who are coming in so far below grade level that when you test them on, let's say sixth grade level, and they're really at a third grade reading level, you're not going to get a true read for what their capabilities are at all. You've already tested them at a frustration level for anything. I'm not sure that it really gives us true results. It just always tells us we're below the expected goal. It's not truly what our students are doing. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

> I feel that at some times it's unfair. They look at us and compare us to other schools and we're just not like other schools. Like I said, it's overwhelming. The problems that we have in this school are sometimes overwhelming. (KY 40-07; eighth grade social studies)

> I feel like we work so hard and our students still don't get where we want them to get, but we're not rewarded for anything, but we look at other schools and they get the money because they... Supposedly their test scores were higher, but we feel like they didn't have to work as hard as we had just to get the kid to come to school. You know, that was a big accomplishment. We have to make phone calls to parents to try to say, "Where's your kid? Why aren't they in school today?" The teachers that get the rewards because the students are self-motivating, they don't have to spend the time on the phone trying to locate the kids, trying to get them to come to school. (KY 20-02; librarian)

Respondents resoundingly rejected the procedure by which cohorts from previous years are used as a baseline to measure performance improvements in subsequent years:

> We're to compare classes from one year to the next, when kids are all different and there are so many different changes that happen with kids. So, I mean, comparing one year to the next year, you can do exactly the same thing or change it for the children, but their scores can still drop because of where the children are. So I mean it depends on the population, what happened to that population at the time, the teachers have all been here for years so it can't be teacher change. A lot of it depends on the kids and their motivation, too. (B-14; sixth grade science)

> I mean, if you look at how transient [District A} and [District B] are, and I'm sure... that's a major factor, that makes me question the validity of the test. The test itself, I think the ideas are good, but the actual using it as a measuring tool with so much, so much pressure or so much...I think that's, I don't feel that it's aimed at urban schools, because you have kids that change schools six times in three years, or more than that. You get really downtown, you have kids that change schools twice a year for their whole elementary school life. How can you hold a principal and their teachers accountable to *that* situation? (G-6; seventh /eighth grade mathematics)

The reasons why Maryland and Kentucky teachers judged their accountability systems as unfair were similar in many ways. The tests did not reflect their efforts due to the difficult socioeconomic environment of the students, and the year-to-year testing of student cohorts ("comparing apples and oranges") did not control for rapid demographic changes and varying levels of students' academic preparedness. But there were factors that Kentucky teachers mentioned specifically: magnet schools, performance plateaus, and financial rewards:

> It [probation] didn't bother me because during the time that the supposed "in decline" happened, the population of the school changed tremendously and that was not taken into account when the scores were noted to be in decline.... During that time period, a number of magnet schools opened in the area and a number of the top students were drawn off of this school into the magnet schools, and the school went from having thirteen special ed. units to having seventeen special ed. units, so there was a tremendous population change, and to me, I don't think that if those things were taken into consideration and balanced out, that I have concerns about how people view the school and I have concerns about all the talk about... And the fact that there are financial rewards given to teachers in schools that are on the rise. If they're on the rise because they've taken all of our top students, then we should get some of the money, too, because we gave them some of the students that are giving them their bonuses. I have trouble tying.... I know there needs to be accountability, but I really have trouble tying what's happening with students with the money the teachers get because our kids start with a dozen strikes against them whereas you go into a school where kids are from intact families, middle class and

> upper-middle class status, parents at home who are literate. (KY 20-04, special education teacher)

> You have your haves and have-nots. I've never received an award so I'm not missing anything, but yet the schools that do receive it are... The ones that don't receive it actually need the money more. They need more incentives, they need more materials. (KY 40-13; seventh grade social studies)

While magnet school programs were a local issue in two of the four Kentucky districts, the presumed leveling of performance was an issue that was addressed in one of the four Kentucky schools in decline that had previously posted gains on a fairly high absolute performance level:

> Well, we talk about this a lot in times you know…We have been a reward school, or they have been a reward school all this time, and you figure you are going to plane out somewhere along the way. You think, okay, we're going to hit a plateau, but we are not going to make as great a gain as what we probably should. Because we've done so well to a point, to hit a plateau. (KY 30-02; fourth grade teacher)

In summary, in their great majority teachers from the eleven schools doubted the fairness of the probation verdict. They questioned either the technical accuracy of the measures that identified them as low-performing or the adequacy of the tests for their specific work situation, which in most cases was a school that serves students from lower socioeconomic strata of society. Most teachers felt that rather than being rewarded for the challenges that this situation entails, the accountability system added insult to injury. Whereas the feeling was widespread that the accountability system is a fact that needs to be taken seriously for the sake of the school's external standing, the system did not tap into deeper layers of teachers' values. Large numbers of teachers in the eleven schools on probation refused to internalize the judgment of their accountability agency. Instead they felt "picked on."

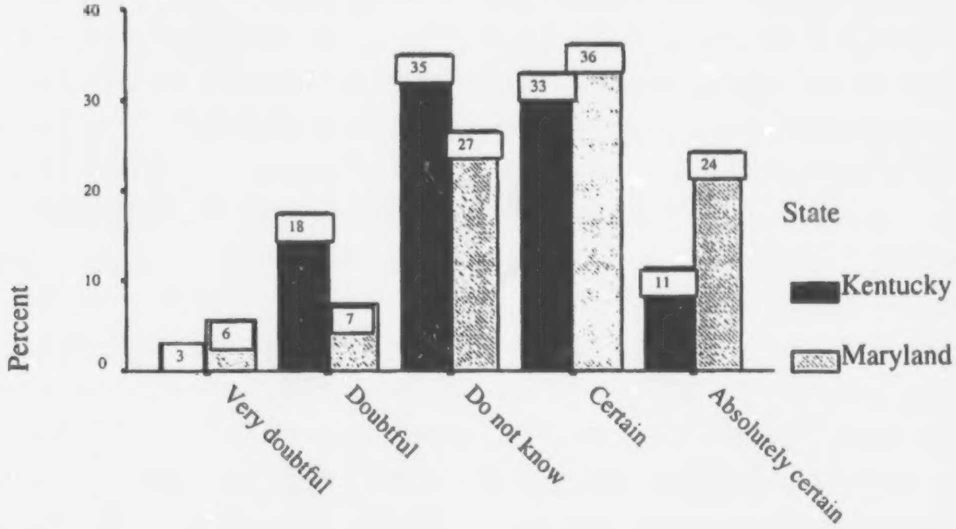
Expectation of Success

A large number of teachers in the eleven-school sample stated that they were compelled to work towards the performance goals of the accountability system in order to get rid of the public stigma of failure. But beyond that, the accountability system appeared to be a less compelling motivator. Teachers held grave doubts about its value. In the eyes of many, it did not measure good teaching, and was not fair to them. In this section, we examine whether study participants expect to be successful in meeting accountability goals.

As scale distributions in Figure III.5 show, teachers who think the system is unrealistic strongly prevailed over those that believed in its realism. Though the system was largely deemed unrealistic, teachers were not as gloomy about improvement successes for their school. When asked what are "[their] expectations for the school to improve noticeably in the near future," our sample of respondents was divided over their schools' prospects (Figure III.7). Among Kentucky respondents, skepticism about the future prevailed over certainty, among Maryland respondents certainty over doubt. About a fourth of respondents from Maryland felt absolutely certain that their school would improve in the near future while only 11 percent of the Kentucky respondents did so. But in all likelihood, teachers' criteria for success were not congruent with those of the accountability system:

> I don't feel it's impossible [to achieve the goal]. I think it may take us a longer time to get those gains that we're expected to get. I think, no, I don't think it's impossible at all. I just think our children take a little bit longer to get there, and I think that's not taken into consideration, that it may take us longer.... I just think things are going to improve. I do believe. Now, I don't know about our scores, but I believe as far as our working together I believe it will improve. (KY 10-5; second grade)

Figure III.7 - Expectation of Improvement



Most of the interviewees in the eleven schools were guardedly optimistic when asked to voice their expectation of the school's success in either increasing test scores or exiting probation. But optimism was laced with a pessimistic undertone: "I'm always an optimist, yeah, I think it's [probation] going to be taken off, especially if I stay here and …have anything to do with it. But anytime soon? No!" (G-17; mathematics). When asked whether they expected their schools to improve in the near future, interviewees replied:

> To be honest with you, I hope so, and I think it will be better, but I think a lot of the problem, a lot of the problem comes from just the area the kids live in. (A-11; health).

> Yes, because, because just the consistency of the teachers, I feel as though, as I said, each year it's getting better, as far as the teachers knowing what and how to implement their classroom lessons, and that will help. So I think the students will be comfortable for the year. The students coming, who came in last year, when the teachers were starting to implement their plan last year, we don't have them this year. And I'm not really seeing it. Actually, to be honest, the kids are much slower this year. (B-11; seventh grade science)

The presumed low level of student performance and the constantly changing quality of student cohorts tempered high hopes. In two of the four Kentucky schools that had suffered from rezoning and competition from magnet schools, teachers mentioned this problem with high frequency. On the survey, teachers from the four Kentucky schools were more pessimistic about their school's prospects and the realism of the state's goals. Judging from the interviews, this pessimism can be attributed to a greater doubt among the sampled Kentucky teachers about their students' potential to perform to the high expectations of the state:

> We're not going to, we're never, and I say this and I mean this seriously, they can do whatever they want and bring as many different faculty members in here and experts and everything, but they're not going to change this school until they change the student population. Until we get more role models in this school. (KY 40-02; eighth grade English)

Often, for as many positive signs of performance improvement, interviewees named conditions that would make it difficult for the school to improve:

> I think now our plan, the upper level students, they're always going to be all right. Now with our plan, I think we are focusing on that middle group, but I still think we may not be at that population that receives those below average grades. And that is the hard part. I mean that population requires much more than we could ever do some time within a school building, and I don't think we touched that yet. (B-12; seventh grade health)

Many interviewees were more doubtful than hopeful in the end:

> Well, it is not impossible. I wouldn't say that it is impossible, but I wouldn't say that it's highly likely. (B-6; sixth grade social studies)
>
> In our time? (Laughs) Oh, Lord. Not without some real radical revolutionary change, I don't think so. (D-3)
>
> I think teachers really get discouraged because the expectations every day get lower and lower and lower as far as what this child can do and their abilities. I think that's a problem when you look at it when it comes time for them to take the MSPAP. Right now I just don't [expect success]. (D-16; sixth grade science teacher)

Overall, interviewed teachers were skeptical as to reaching the external quantitative performance goals, but found growth in small increments possible. In Maryland, particularly, teachers were unclear whether these envisioned increments would "get them off the list." In Maryland, at the time the interviews were conducted, no school had ever exited probation.

Widespread skepticism notwithstanding, optimism was an act of faith; the only option in this situation for many:

> So I have to be optimistic enough to say that this is all going to work out.... That's a strong statement. Because I have no choice.(A-16; English department head)
>
> I really believe we can change, and that's the bottom line. We're just going to do it.... I'm, I *am* optimistic. I *do* love...these kids... They're challenging, but my own child is challenging, and I want the best for them, and a lot of just loving and caring and...it's just what I want the school to do. (A-3; reading specialist)
>
> There's only one way to go. We can't get worse. And that was the feeling last year. With all the things, yeah, it will get better if we can keep working together, you know. It will be better. (C-11; first grade teacher)
>
> I believe, I believe it will be. I can *see* the difference already. (F-6)

> Yes. Anything is possible. (F-9)
>
> I have to trust that they [the test scores] will be [higher], you know, 'cause if I don't have faith, I'm not gonna perform. (G-11; seventh/eighth grade mathematics)
>
> Well, just having a positive attitude is one way of being optimistic, and my students are eager to learn. (KY 10-13; third grade)

A less faith-based and more reasoned optimism linked performance hopes for improvements to the new funds the schools received, new personnel the school had on board, and new instructional programs the districts had acquired:

> I think with the strategies and techniques that we have in mind, that we plan on implementing for the next school year, I can only see positive results in terms of turning the school around. (A-4; vice principal)
>
> I was optimistic because I thought this was an opportunity, as I said, to get the resources we need. (A-6; eighth grade mathematics)

One repeatedly mentioned plus for the school's prospects was new technology:

> I think it can be realistic, if the proper things were put into place. We make sure all the kids get exposure to the computer. (B-8; sixth grade special education)
>
> I don't think it [raising of the test scores] happened this year. I'm hopeful for next year. We're getting new computers, which will solve a big part of my technology problem. (KY 10-08; music)

If additional support had not accrued to the school yet, teachers conditioned their expectations of success on the availability of new resources. Thus, hope was often linked with calls for help:

> So yes, I do think we can improve, given, but with the notation that only given what we ask for. (A-2, eighth grade science)
>
> I feel very confident that with the help that we are going to get, I really feel that the school scores, the test scores are going to increase. So, I really feel confident. ...Yes. I positively think so, because I think that what

> we're doing is, we are writing a plan that....identifies our needs. That was the first thing. And, by doing that, we've set standards and goals, and I think the things that we are working on now will definitely show an increase in our scores, because it will bring the resources that we need...materials, the additional materials that we need, hopefully additional staff people that we need, different clubs and things that will be in the making. I definitely feel that, I feel very positive that all of this is going to help our scores to improve. And more staff development for the teachers. All of this hand in hand, I'm sure will cause our scores to go up. (C-4 media specialist)

Principals, especially, stressed that additional resources were indispensable if the school was to make progress:

> The superintendent told me when he hired me that he wasn't pleased with the academic performance of the school. I can make a difference. Give me what I need and I can make a difference. (A-1; principal middle school)

> Well, I feel confident that I have done the job that I can do to make a difference in the school, but the test data shows different. However, I feel that if I get the resources, the human resources, physical resources as well as the budget that I need, I can turn this school around totally. The vision that I have set forth for myself is a school of excellence. I believe that we can reach that. (C-1; principal elementary school)

In schools that experienced test score increases in years prior to the decline that led to probation, some teachers voiced confidence that past performance may be repeated:

> I think it's possible. And I say that because for one, the past two years of achievement has improved, and with that not only did we receive a certificate, we received a monetary reward for that and that takes a lot of effort on the administration's part. And with the vision that she has and for the teachers to be able to follow through with that vision to get to that point. So I think it's a possibility. I think if any school will probably move off of it, it will be this school. (E-2) [Two years later School E was finally taken over by the state.]

A few teachers based their optimism on improvements that they already had experienced since the school had become probationary:

> We are finally bridging the gap. The gap is narrowed between what our students are learning....Teachers being able to teach. If teachers can't teach, students can't learn. And I can say this about the administration: They're tough on students. I mean discipline is hard. It's just zero tolerance, you know. If the same staff returns, I can see our scores going up, if we can keep most of the people here. (A-22; eighth grade mathematics)

Optimism was only infrequently linked to classroom conditions or changes. A minority of teachers stated that they simply worked harder, and in a few instances teachers pointed to the visibly beneficial effects of new programs in their classrooms. In elementary schools, new phonics-based reading programs, such as *Open Court* or *Success For All* instilled hope. Perhaps because of the timing of the interviews, evaluation of these new initiatives could not have been expected at this time. It seems safe to say, however, that for the majority of informants, expectations of improvement tended to be linked to classroom-external events and conditions beyond their control. Only a few teachers mentioned high expectations for students as a prerequisite for success, such as this teacher who we asked whether she expected test scores to go up:

> I really hope so. I just have to remind myself not to lower my standards. To keep my standards high and to make sure that they know what I expect of them and what this school and this county expects of them. But sometimes you get, when you see a whole class that doesn't meet the standards, you want to lower your standards, and you just have to somehow pull it out of them. (B-15; seventh grade English)

Other teachers dealt with the issue of standards differently. They wished for a better selection of students:

> ...'cause it's about fifteen students that really are the discipline problems. If we got rid of them, we would be rolling along. (B-7; fifth grade)

> Well I hope so. I hope we are going to align the curriculum and, you know, hold the children back, and I would even like to have a third grade exit

> thing. If you can't do this, this, and this, then you cannot come to fourth grade at _____School. And if the parents have a problem with that or they don't want to hold them back, then they have 10 other schools they can choose from. (KY30-14)

It was rare that teachers based their hopes for the school on their own learning and changing in their classrooms. A new kindergarten teacher was an exception:

> Well, I just try to do my best and I'm trying to, because I know I've learned from all the mistakes I made last year and I'm just really trying to push my kids, expect a lot from them and so that, you know, because it starts here. I mean, we do the MSPAP tests, and we do all those things that they're going to be seeing later on so as long as I'm doing my job, I'm not too concerned about it. (C-13; kindergarten)

Most often, changes in teachers' own classrooms that instilled optimism revolved around test preparation strategies:

> So as a school, we have implemented, make sure, that every grade level is inundated, and inundate the students, with MSPAP. (B-12; seventh /eighth grade health)

Administrators and teachers with special assignments, such as instructional specialists or DE/HSE's had a different perspective. In interviews with them, instructional changes were either the main reasons for optimism or the main condition on which their optimism hinged:

> Oh yeah. There are some very hardworking persons on the staff and if somehow we could tap in and have that focused into just a slightly different direction. You know, I'm not saying they're not working hard when they're trying to teach the kids fractions or they're not working hard when they're trying to get the kids to memorize the nouns or conjugate the verbs, but if we could just focus that into a different direction. (A-9; master teacher)

> Well, I think that instructional methodology.... I think teachers have now come to grips with the fact that the old stand up and lecture type instruction is no longer apropos to students of today. I think again, gearing instruction to the way MSPAP is set up, aids and abets with the

> achievement of this goal, and I think probably the biggest thing that will take us there is the change that teachers are incurring in instructional methodology. (G-7; assistant principal)

But some specialists were more doubtful about the school's prospects. The instructional coordinator at School B based her insights on an analysis of "realistic" standards that was rather sophisticated compared to the rest of the sample:

> I look at it more with the test. What is the problem with the test? Because, actually when I step out and look at what the county is doing as a whole, for example, _____School is the number one middle school, right now. Their composite index is the highest in the county, they're at 26. That is a school that literally hand picks who comes to them. I mean there is a very strict criteria, you either meet it or you don't. So they are taking the cream of the cream of the crop from the entire county. Their composite index is 18 points higher than ours in this building. With, obviously, we don't have a criteria, we get whoever comes to our door, and it's ever changing. So when you look at it that way, they are operating 18 points higher than we are, again not meeting the state standard. I have to really start taking a look at the tests and seeing, I mean...if we are saying these are the brightest and these are the best and they are not meeting a state standard, I think people are very confused about what exactly that standard should be or is…I believe in the premise of the test, which is to have a child that can think critically and write well. So the premise of the test is good. What I think is that for this age group of kids, it is not realistic to not take into account the differing populations when you are twelve years old or thirteen years old. And the test is just not willing to make any accommodations for social backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, that kind of things. It's just a very, very real problem.... I would say in general, no [the school will not reach the state's goal]. I mean every year, we have a few kids who do well on the test. Last year we had quite a few kids do well on the test. But for the most part it puts them in situations or gives them reading material that is so foreign to them. (B-20)

The guidance counselor in School C argued in a similar vein:

> No. I don't think it's going to be successful. I mean, I'm glad you're using a pseudonym for me, because, the reason I don't think this school's successful is because.. I don't know, I don't know based on...I'm always observant and always read, and always listen to news, and I don't know any place that's been successful. So, why do I expect it to be successful at

> [School C]? I never knew of any place so far that reconstitution, that there's been a success rate. (C-2)

One of the Kentucky teachers doubted that the continuous improvement scheme of the KY accountability design was realistic:

> I think if they set a goal that was attainable, then possibly we could meet that goal, but it seems like when they add on to it every year, whatever wasn't achieved, that it still bumps us just enough behind that we're not going to get there. I scored portfolios this year as well as last and we still have a large number of novices, but they were much higher novices than they were last year. I mean, they're getting closer to being apprentice work. As distressing as it is when you have 285 novice portfolios in the building, probably 150 of those were at least closer to being apprentice than they were, but as far as accountability-wise, it's still novice. I guess I always feel like we're just that one step behind of what we can get to. (KY 40-04; sixth grade reading)

It was a recurring theme that the chances for improving performance depended on faculty cohesion, unity, and stability, as well as harmonious and supportive relationships between faculty and administration. Many interviewees, however, deplored the fragile state of collegial relationships among educators:

> If we all focus on what we're supposed to be doing, it should work. Everyone needs to take a part and be accountable for their part of getting this done. (B-9; fifth grade)

> So, something is starting to take hold. There is starting to be a difference, but I attribute it more to the effort of the administration and faculty in making a concerted effort, in being consistent and, than to all the subcommittee meetings you can have… and all those other things. We have been successful, I think ourselves in keeping our priorities in line. However, we still have too little time for preparation. (A-12; seventh grade English)

> Well, I'm hopeful from a standpoint that I believe that there is a good core group of teachers here, and we'll be able to do what we need to do. They put some resources in here, but I believe that it was here before they even put the resources here. (A-8; eighth grade social studies)

> I think [we will be successful] once every educator realizes that we really are a whole unit here, that we're not separate from each other and that we don't wait and then we don't blame, well those fourth grade teachers are not doing their job. You know it has to start in kindergarten and the kids have to be able to bring it with them when they come and we all have to work together to talk about what the problems and the needs are. So hopefully it will help. (KY 10-04; fourth grade teacher)

Although overshadowed by the call for additional help, many interviewees acknowledged the necessity for increased work effort if their school was to succeed. Probation signaled the need for hard work.

> I think we will make gains.... Because it's like now the handwriting is on the wall. The schools have been identified, so it's like people feel they really don't have a choice. I mean, you really work this time, to buckle down. It's time to really spend time and do what you should have been doing since you entered into the career. That's what your expertise is. Not be laid back, but it's time to jump in. That's our only hope.... I guess I'm saying until that happens... that everybody's on the same page and not confused and not frustrated. (A-17; eighth grade English)

> I think the recon schools need to, I think this should come from the board, but they need to allow teachers who do not want to put in the work that it will take to turn the school around to leave without a penalty, without you know, made to feel badly about the situation because if you don't have, you have teachers in this building who are out the door at 3:00. It's just not going to work next year if you, you know, have people like that. It's hopeless. Some things have to be in place in order for it to be.[successful]. (C-10; mathematics specialist)

> I think if everyone kind of picks up their boot straps and does their very best that he or she can do, then sure. (C-3; science department chair)

For others, success depended less on resources or effort, but foremost on the quality of teachers that was either lacking or present in their school:

> The only way these scores are going to improve is if they hire educated teachers, which they're not doing. So, I don't..., good luck to them. I don't see how they're going to do it.... I wish them the best of luck, but I think it's going to be very difficult, and I almost think that the kids are getting more pressure about it than the teachers are because a lot of the teachers

> really just don't care. So, the students are taking the brunt of it. (D-21; sixth grade mathematics)

> I would say yes [we will succeed]. Now, if you ask me when, that one I would not have an answer for.... But I really, because I,...and I have done some observations myself of other teachers, and I really do believe that quality teachers are here. And I think that's number one, quality teachers. (B-17; seventh grade mathematics)

Nobody felt that their hopes had diminished as a result of probation, but many found the punitive character of probation unhelpful for the schools' prospects: "I think we can do it. I think that if the state department lets teachers know that they really appreciate what we do: we want you to succeed, and that we can.... But there is this looming feeling" (B-7; sixth grade mathematics).

In summary, in the survey a large majority of respondents expressed their doubts about their school reaching the official standards. Respondents were more hopeful for incremental improvements for their schools. In the interviews, pessimists and optimists were somewhat in balance. But optimism was guarded and mixed with doubt. For many teachers, optimism was an article of faith or is based on factors outside of the interviewees' control, such as additional resources, personnel, programs, etc. Expectations of success were often coupled with expectations for more help. A number of teachers acknowledged the necessity for increased effort, but these demands were not personalized. Very few interviewees made a connection between expectations of success and actions in their own classrooms. An exception was test-related activities that were seen as directly helpful. Teachers widely emphasized cohesion and unity among the professionals in the school and the whole system as prerequisites of success. Accountability and probation, in the eyes of some, may foster such unity. Judging from the interviews, probation does not necessarily make teachers more pessimistic as long it is seen as supportive rather than punitive. On the whole, teachers in the eleven schools were more skeptical as to their chances of exiting probation. In the Maryland schools, this is due to unclear exit criteria and high performance demands. Teachers from the four Kentucky schools were more overwhelmingly pessimistic. With the exception of one school where the spirit prevailed that "most things we have ever undertaken we are pretty successful in," (KY 30-05), doubts about students' performance potential were quite strong. Very few interviewees discussed their feelings of optimism in terms of their own high expectations for their students. There is very little evidence that teachers changed their own expectations of their students in alignment with the states' expectations.

Direction

Though fairly large majorities of sampled teachers either felt negative or uncertain about the system's validity, fairness, and degree of realism, the balance tilted to the other side when teachers were asked to rate the degree to which they feel guided by the system. As shown in Figure III.5, nearly half of the teachers in both states believed that they were guided relatively well by the accountability system. More than half (between 51 and 56 percent, depending on item) believed that the "accountability goals tell [them] what is most important for the school to accomplish," and a similar percentage conceded that "the accountability goals provide a focus for [their] teaching efforts." Similarly, about half of the respondents reported that they had a good understanding of what the test entailed for the school, and only 14 percent admitted to not being "exactly sure what [their] students are expected to do on the tests [MSPAP, KIRIS/CATS]." Again, about half believed that public release items and practice packages gave them "a pretty good idea of the content" of the test prior to actual test administration. Thus, doubts of fairness, validity, and realism notwithstanding, about half of the teachers felt guided by the accountability system in their actions, and as we saw earlier, an even higher proportion attached great importance to the goal of raising test scores and exiting probation. Apparently, larger proportions of teachers recognized the power of facts than actively embraced the system for its validity and fairness. The system provided authoritative goals for many, but even more rejected it as a valued and valid measure of one's own performance.

On the other hand, the more the importance of the system's performance goals increased for respondents, the more they thought that the system was fair ($r = -.20$**), realistic ($r = -.28$**), and valid as a measure of good teaching ($r = .32$**). The more respondents believed in the importance of the system's goals, the more they reported that they were guided by the system ($r = .38$**). The more realistic these performance goals appeared to responding teachers, the more they believed that the system was fair ($r = .52$**) and valid ($r = -.38$**).[1] It is plausible in light of these data to assume that if teachers' sense of the accountability system's fairness, validity, and realism were higher, they would attach more importance to achieving its goals.

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[1] Note that realism and fairness scales are negative scale: the higher the number is, the more negative the rating.

Summary

Teachers' attitudes towards the accountability system can be summarized as follows. Relatively small numbers of responding teachers perceived their accountability system as fair, thought that the performance goals are realistic, and believed in the evaluative validity of the system for good teaching. On the other hand, more responding teachers felt guided by the system in their work and found it important to overcome the public stigma of failure by raising test scores. The evidence shows that respondents from the eleven schools heeded the system, but they did so without conviction. More teachers let themselves be guided by the system and wanted to be rid of probation than committed themselves to the actual performance goals or viewed their own performance through the lens of the system. Teachers in these eleven probationary schools had serious misgivings about the accountability system. It is not surprising, then, that an overwhelming majority of respondents in either state criticized the system's status quo. Only nine percent agreed that "the accountability system should remain as is."

5. Social Interactions at the Workplace

The literature on teacher motivation and commitment has consistently pointed to the positive or negative influence of work group interactions. Flourishing collegiality as well as able and supportive principal leadership have been shown to shore up commitment and encourage staff to engage in reform. The questionnaire contained 10 items that serve to explore the relationship between performance motivation and probation. Out of these items, we composed three scales (see Box III.6). A *Collegiality* scale, consisting of four items, inquired about the presence of consensus and support as well as lively discussion and learning among faculty. A *Principal Support* scale, consisting of three items, emphasized the leader's recognition for employees through encouragement, praise, and consultation. A *Principal Enforcement* scale, consisting of three items, emphasized the leader's role in setting structure through initiative, rule making, pressure, compliance expectation, and enforcement. These latter aspects deserve particular attention since accountability systems are characteristically hierarchies in which performance expectations are formulated at the top and filtered down through the administrative lines of authority to teachers (and students).

Box III.6 - School Site Scales

Collegiality scale

- Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.
- There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff here.
- I can count on colleagues here when I feel down about my teaching or my students.
- In this school, the faculty discusses major decisions and sees to it that there are carried out

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .87

Principal Support scale

- The school administration's behaviors to wards the staff is supportive and encouraging.
- The principal usually consults with staff members before he/she makes decisions that affect teachers.
- Staff members are recognized for a job well-done.

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .78

Principal Enforcement scale

- The principal sets priorities, makes plans, and sees that they are carried out.
- The principal puts pressure on teachers to get results.
- In this school, the principal tells us what the district and the state expect of us, and we comply.

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .67

Although the eleven schools may have carried the mark of crisis as a result of the probation label, collegial relationships within these schools were seen as overwhelmingly positive. The mean for the 20-point collegiality scale was 15.3 for Kentucky teachers and

13.2 for Maryland teachers. Likewise, the majority of respondents saw their principals as supportive, but even more so as an enforcer of policies (means or 9.9 and 11.0, respectively, on a 15-point scale). Scale means for Maryland and Kentucky teachers were similar, but Maryland teachers had a slightly higher tendency to see their principal as an enforcer. The opposite is the case for principal support. Thus, expressed in teacher ratings the Kentucky schools appeared to be more collegial and supportive, the Maryland schools more hierarchical. More descriptive data on the schools will be provided in subsequent parts of this report.

Group Accountability

The accountability systems in the two states hold whole schools accountable for performance improvements rather than individual teachers. If probation unleashes effective group accountability, one would expect faculties to pull together. Since every faculty member's contribution is needed to succeed, such faculties would work towards sharing the burden of improvement. Alternatively, since school-wide scores reflect on all teachers equally regardless of effort, the more involved or more effective teachers may put pressure on the less involved and effective ones to live up to higher standards.

In the questionnaire we inquired about teachers' sense of group accountability and burden-sharing with four items. Responses to the four items show that teachers were divided on the effect of probation on the group (see Box III.7 for the items used to compose the burden-sharing scale).

Box III.7 - Burden-Sharing Scale

Burden-Sharing scale

- In this school, a few teachers carry the load of improving the school for the majority.
- In this school, reconstitution eligibility / our accountability status / makes hard-working teachers work even harder, but has no effect on the ones that need to improve the most.
- The staff seldom evaluates its programs and activities.
- Being reconstitution-eligible / Our accountability status / as a whole school has brought the faculty together. Almost everybody is making a contribution. (Values are reversed)

Reliability (Cronbach alpha) = .68

The scale mean for the 20-point *Burden-Sharing* scale was 11.0. Respondents were fairly evenly divided on the occurrence of burden-sharing in their schools. Kentucky teachers tended to be slightly more positive about their schools in this regard, undergirding the impression that the four Kentucky schools in the sample tended to be more collegial and supportive compared to the Maryland schools. In terms of single items, not even half of the respondents reported that probation "has brought the faculty together." More than half reported that in their school "the same small group of people sits on most of the committees and is involved in most of the new projects and programs here." But when the question more directly addresses burden-sharing, teachers were almost evenly divided. Roughly one third agreed and one third disagreed that in their school "a few teachers carry the load of improving the school for the majority." Slightly more teachers agreed than disagreed that probation "makes the hard-working teachers work even harder, but has no effect on the ones that need to improve the most." But many teachers felt neutral about this issue. It was uncommon, however, that the hard working ones actually put "pressure on the ones that work less hard." Only 10 percent of the respondents from the Maryland schools and 20 percent from the Kentucky schools agreed with this item. Generally, burden-sharing was perceived as more common in the

Kentucky schools than the Maryland schools. For example, almost half of the Kentucky respondents (49 percent) agreed that probation brought the faculty together while only one third (33 percent) did so in the Maryland schools. One fourth of the Kentucky respondents agreed that few teachers carry the improvement load for the majority while 41 percent agreed to this item in the Maryland schools. The data from these items suggest that group accountability has not quite taken hold across the eleven schools. Respondents had mixed feelings about the issue. Clearly, group accountability that involves group pressure was not noticed much in the eleven schools.

6. Job Commitment

Once a school is publicly exposed in its purported shortcomings, it is eminently important for successful school improvement that high quality teachers be retained or attracted. It is conceivable that a probation designation may invigorate the commitment of teachers to the organization as they take up the challenge of public rebuke. Alternatively, teachers may loose hope, may fear additional pressures, or may resent having their own professional reputation or self-worth tainted by the probation stigma. If probation accelerates faculty turnover and if it drives out the "wrong" teachers, i.e. those that are skillful and in support of the accountability system, then it would have serious negative repercussions for a school's performance prospects.

We examined, therefore, how committed teachers were about staying at their school, what reasons they might have for staying or leaving, and how they perceived their schools' situation with regard to teacher retention and recruitment.

Respondents were asked to choose among six statements to rate their commitment. We defined two of the statements as *high* or *definite commitment*, one as *medium* or *uncertain commitment*, and two as *no commitment*. Definitely committed teachers expressed the intention of either staying put, or staying put through the improvement process. Uncertain teachers envisioned staying perhaps for another year, while teachers who wished to leave were categorized as uncommitted to their school on probation. In addition, we gave respondents a list of 11 possible reasons to stay and 10 possible reasons to leave, plus one free response box for either category.

Overall, about half of all respondents expressed a definite commitment to staying at the school, about a fifth was uncertain, and between a fourth and a third of teachers were ready to move. Teachers from Kentucky schools were more committed to their school than Maryland respondents: 59 percent from Kentucky as opposed to 46 percent in Maryland expressed certainty. Of those 46 percent, only 22 percent saw this school as "their place," while that number was 42 percent in the Kentucky sample. When only half of a faculty was certain of staying, commitment to the organization was a precious commodity in schools on probation, particularly across the seven Maryland schools. These figures from Maryland matched a real yearly teacher turnover rate of up to 50 percent in many of the seven schools during the study period. But even for the four Kentucky schools, it is not clear whether the higher commitment was defined positively, or negatively as lack of exit options.

Reasons for Staying or Leaving

A number of reasons for staying appear to be of equal strength (see Table III.4). Respondents that were committed to staying accept the challenge, hoped for improvement, and liked administration, colleagues, and students. Of relatively lesser importance was their role in the community. Positive energy at school as a result of probation or lack of exit options were relatively unimportant reasons for staying. Thus, responding teachers committed to their probationary school seemed to be positively stirred by the designation, but less swayed by actual positive reverberations of the new status.

Reasons for leaving differed by state (See Table III.5). In the Kentucky sample, respondents' strongest reason for leaving was pressure due to the probationary status of the school, followed by disappointment with students, community, and district. Exit options, on the other hand, played less of a role as reasons for leaving. Among Maryland teachers, reasons for leaving were weighted differently. Here, exit options (i.e. other career options and higher pay elsewhere) stood out as most important reasons for leaving, in addition to a general sense that the school was like a sinking ship. Probation-specific reasons were of lesser importance.

Of all Maryland teachers who were likely to leave or are uncertain to stay with their job at school, 65-77 percent viewed exit options (better pay or career opportunity elsewhere) as important reasons to leave, while 33-43 percent of Kentucky teachers thought so. As noted earlier, career opportunities were most likely more plentiful in the booming Washington-Baltimore corridor where the seven Maryland schools were located, than in the Kentucky locations, though in Kentucky, respondents largely denied lack of exit options as a reason for staying. It is conceivable that disenchanted Maryland respondents would feel more pressure from probation if they would or could exercise exit options to a lesser extent. Alternatively, it is conceivable that increased exit options could decrease overall commitment in the four Kentucky schools and attenuate the perception of pressure from probation. In this case, other career options might act as a valve.

Table III.4 - Reasons for Staying at Current Job (Rank Order)*

Rank	Maryland (*N* =148 to 159)	Rank	Kentucky (*N* =82 to 90)
1.	I have great hope for the school (91%)	1.	I like my colleagues (95%)
2.	I like the students (89%)	2.	I like the administration (92%)
3.	We will prove we are better than it appears (85%)	3.	I like the students (89%)
4.	I like my colleagues (82%)	4.	We will prove we are better than it appears (88%)
4.	I like the administration (82%)	4.	I have great hope for the school (88%)
6.	I play an important role for this community (66%)	6.	I have friends here (83%)
7.	**Probation has greatly energized this school (61%).**	7.	I play an important role for this community (71%)
8.	I have friends here (60%)	8.	**Probation has greatly energized this school (56%)**
9.	The school is close to my home (56%)	9.	The school is close to my home (38%)
10.	I have no other option at this point (21%)	10.	I have no other option at this point (17%)
11.	I am too close to retirement to change schools (18%)	11.	I am too close to retirement to change schools (13%)

* Rank based on percent answering each item as "Very important" or "Important."

Table III.5 Reasons for Leaving from Current Job (Rank Order)*

Rank	Maryland (*N* =97 to 108)	Rank	Kentucky (*N* =64 to 81)
1.	I have better career options elsewhere (67%)	1.	I am tired of the additional pressure probation has put on this school (73%)
2.	The school feels like a sinking ship (62%)	2.	The students here wear me down (72%)
2.	I can get higher pay elsewhere (62%)	3.	My work is unappreciated by the community (63%)
4.	This district is not a place where one can be successful as a teacher (59%)	4.	This district is not a place where one can be successful as a teacher (60%)
5.	I am tired of the additional pressure probation has put on this school (57%)	5.	The school feels like a sinking ship (58%)
6.	You cannot count on teachers here (51%)	6.	You cannot count on teachers here (47%)
6.	The students here wear me down (51%)	7.	I have better career options elsewhere (40%)
8.	My work is unappreciated by the community (47%)	8.	I do not like the administration (37%)
8.	I do not like the administration (47%)	9.	I can get higher pay elsewhere (33%)
10	I will retire this year (12%)	10.	I will retire this year (20%)

* Rank based on percent answering each item as "Very important" or "Important."

In the interviews, the most frequent reasons for staying were the feeling of being needed, supportive colleagues and administrators, convenience, hope that the school would be successful, and the potential for professional growth, the latter a common motive in the one high-performing Kentucky school in decline. Similarly to survey responses, interviewees were eager to refute the notion that they were at their job site by default, trapped in low-performing schools not unlike their students. Therefore many stressed that they could pursue other options, but consciously chose to stay at their school:

> I could easily go anywhere else. I'm a black male, science. I get job offers all the time.... I think that there's a need for me here. I really do and that's one reason why I became a teacher. Teaching to me is like ministry. If you don't really feel that way about it, you need to get a check somewhere else, probably for more money. My wife's income allows me to do this, to be a teacher. It's not for everyone. If you don't have the kids' best interests in mind, then teaching is not for you. It's a little selfish on my part because I want to have a better society and this is one of the ways that I can impact society. I have a baby. I wonder where she'll go to school, what kind of people she'll have to deal with. That's why I'm here, to cut a role for my family and these young people. (KY 40-15; sixth grade science)

A sense of pride was widespread in having found a way to master a difficult and challenging teaching assignment, voiced by this male eighth grade English teacher:

> These kids need people who care about them, and I care about them. If I'm to be faulted for anything, it's that I care too much about these kids. They need positive role models and they need somebody that can make a difference, that can turn on the light switch, that can show them that I'm just an average person, that I came from a family that didn't have a whole lot. What we did have, we had love. My parents were there for us, but financially we didn't have a whole lot either. Just to show them that I care and they need that. I just like teaching these kinds of kids. Not everybody will teach here. I tell anybody that. Not everybody can teach this kind of kid. They just can't. It would eat them alive. These kids will eat you alive if you don't know how to deal with them. That's why I wouldn't

> think of going anywhere. I've had opportunities. I could've gone to other places, but I've never pursued them. (KY 40-02)

But many others, especially novice teachers, expressed exhaustion and a desire to move on, despite feeling needed:

> I think these two years have really worn me out. And I think I want to expand. I've really learned a love for the educational field and for these kids. I'm not sure that the classroom is the best place for me to do, to be, excuse me. I've really been run down by a lot of things that I don't feel like I can control in the classroom. You know, I've got these kids for, I've got these kids in this class for three and a half hours a day..... it's tough for me to kind of put in place a lot of things for them to survive outside of the classroom. I don't know if you understand what I'm talking about. (F-20; third grade mathematics)

Maryland educators, in particular, made staying contingent upon developments at their school regarding performance or adult relationships, such as the assistant principal in School A:

> I would stay because I'm very interested in taking on this challenge, but if things don't turn around,.... if I don't see them moving in the right direction and if I see the primary reason being, if I may attribute it to the principal, then I have to move on. I would have to do that. (A-4; assistant principal)

The social studies department head in the same school, by contrast, intended to stay put:

> Because I'm a stakeholder. I traditionally do not put in for transfers. I'm here in this building because my other school closed down, and converted to another school. I probably would still be in that building.... I'm a stakeholder. These are our kids. These are our problems. You deal with it. And, granted, it's not always the most positive, but life wasn't always promised to be easy. And, you deal with it. And yes I, for selfish reasons also, I guess, I don't have to get on the Beltway and travel half around the world. That's important to me. (A-7)

This mixture of hardiness and convenience was quite common among senior teachers when they explained their commitment to staying at their school:

> It's a tough place to work. Like I said, the problems that we have with some of these students are overwhelming. You really have to lay the law down. I've been around here for quite a while, so I survive here, but for a young teacher to come in here for the first time, first year, it's probably too much, and I've seen them come and go.... I'm at the point now where I'm almost ready to retire so I've decided to spend my time and it's only one more year. I'm close to home and it only takes me about 10 minutes to get here. Like I said, I'm used to this kind of war zone. I've thought about putting in transfers over the years, but something always happens to make me change my mind. (KY 40-07; eighth grade social studies)

A younger teacher in the same school described how he learned to endure this "war zone":

> My first year here I was physically assaulted three times. I was assaulted this year already. But I think as you're here longer, the kids respect you a little more. When I came, it was in the middle of the school year. It was in September. There was only one week left out of the first six weeks of grading and they already had three permanent teachers leave before I got here, not counting the subs that they had. My first year, all the kids were like, "Well, we got rid of three plus the subs, we'll get rid of you." It was very difficult my first year and then I went through [a teacher preparation program] at the same time, but I was determined that I was going to do it. When I came back the second year, it was like I was an old-timer. In the kid's eyes, you've been here forever. Every year it's gotten a lot easier. (KY 40-12; art)

This teacher's endurance is remarkable in light of the actual turnover in the schools, especially in the Maryland schools. Many teachers expressed unwillingness to tolerate these kinds of conditions for a long time and many of those who indicated the desire to leave bemoaned the lack of discipline in their schools as a primary reason.

In seven of the eleven schools, probation reportedly triggered a wave of transfers. While interviewees themselves rarely gave probation as the sole reason why they would want to leave their school, they were sure that some of their colleagues were leaving or had already left because of it:

> There was a mass exodus out of our building, a lot of people saw [probation as]…. an opportunity for people to come in and scrutinize what we were doing. You know, the old "under the microscope thing," and because of that a lot of people did leave. Because, in fact to be real honest with you, that's what people are even saying this year. People want to transfer out because they decided they don't want to be in a reconstitution eligible school…. Because we have people in and out of our building from the school improvement team, from the state department and they are looking for certain things and it requires more teacher accountability which needless to say requires more teacher work. And people are unhappy about that. (A-6; eighth grade mathematics)

This eighth grade mathematics teacher herself also decided to leave. But she stated it was not because of probation, but because of disagreements with her principal. A teacher from School B who decided to stay described the situation in this way:

> This is a very good staff. We've lost good teachers…[The reconstitution-eligible label], I think, that had something to do with it, and in fact I know that it did… Many teachers, especially teachers who've been on the battlefield for a while, are just not real comfortable with the extra stress. You know, teaching itself has a lot of demands. And anybody who's an effective teacher generally, on a good day, goes home tired. And so, with the added stress of, "Oh, the state is here," I mean, you know, there's some added stress to being recon-eligible. And I think teachers are reluctant to continue with that added stress. I really do…. Yes, indeed. There're a lot of teachers who would stay here, now I'm one of those people who's going to be here until the cows come home, you know, the kids'll be rolling me down the hall, the year two thousand ninety, saying, "Ms. K, it's time to go to lunch." I just love this school. But, there are teachers who are not willing to go through that fire. (B-7; sixth grade mathematics)

Not unlike the pattern found in the quantitative data, more interviewees from the Maryland schools shared a desire to leave than from the Kentucky schools. It was striking to us that educators were prepared to leave regardless of their role or level of involvement in the school. We encountered a desire to leave among novice teachers frustrated with their teaching as much as among school improvement team members, department heads, school improvement plan writers, and administrators who were instrumental in their school's improvement process. For the latter, often a combination of reasons came together: career advancements, better options elsewhere, disagreements with the administration, feelings of powerlessness in the face of the school's downward trend, and a general sense of being overburdened. The probationary status of their school was stated infrequently as a reason for this group. Some highly involved teachers explicitly denied that probation had anything to do with their decision or desire to leave. In schools where probation was high profile, the school's status influenced highly involved teachers indirectly. Many resented additional pressures due to probation, such as the requirement for daily lesson plans, expanded record keeping, more supervision, new programs, etc. The English department head in School A explained her reasons for leaving this way:

> My contract very clearly states that we are to attend, required to attend two faculty staff meetings outside of school hours, per month. And, I am currently attending six. And I've been trying to figure out why, for the past couple of weeks. And I'm really not a complainer. I'm not in the union. I'm not part of the Teachers' Association. But it started kind of affecting me a little bit, just in terms of, OK, well, you can't quite split yourself up into all these different ways. And I think my biggest concept is, and I probably wouldn't even be complaining...and the issue gets much bigger because we were supposed to get our raises, which are supposed now to be in effect next week, but you know, it's just a lot to ask when you don't seem to be compensated, and that starts to make a teacher somewhat bitter.... And I'm not a bitter person, I mean.... I'm not even, it's not even recognition. It's really a situation where, "OK, I could get this done, but you know, working for peanuts here." Maybe I wouldn't be complaining about having to go get folders from Staples to do an extra workshop, if you know, my check.... and it didn't matter at that point. Things like that almost, really start to affect your motivation. It starts to affect how much commitment you want to have, and how much, it's a matter of commitment. It's a matter of loyalty... You know, if I could leave this building next week, I would leave at this point. (A-16)

The most often cited reason, for novices and seasoned teachers alike, was that the work stress at their school had simply become too high and the rewards too low:

> Let me say this. I believe in being honest. I will take [a leave], and it's not because of administration, and it's not because of our students. I really feel that anywhere, the situation right now, where it's going to take so much, so much work, and I'm trying to focus on having certain programs at your school, and then all these extra things. It's going to be overwhelming for a lot of people, especially for myself, 'cause I have a family. And I want to even have another child in the next year, and recently I've been trying to put myself in position where I can, where I can land a position and I can make more money, so I'll only have to work part time. You see, and I think this situation is going to, the dilemma that we face at ______Elementary School is of teachers who also have a family. It's enough when they have to take lessons home just to plan for the next day. Then you're gonna have all these extra things that you need to be involved with, and things you need to do at home and stuff. You're overwhelmed. (C-2; guidance counselor)

Recruitment and Retention

It has been hypothesized, and sometimes feared, that probation makes the negatively labeled school an unattractive workplace, particularly for those who, because of their qualifications, have a choice to find employment elsewhere. Probation in this line of thinking may accelerate the exit of the most qualified teachers or may deter them from applying. We saw in the previous section that quite a sizable number of teachers considered leaving their school. Given the potential for high turnover, it is key for the improvement chances of schools that the turnover not result in an exit of high quality teachers. Not only is the talent of high quality teachers needed, it may also adversely impact teachers' morale and commitment if they perceive their school as being abandoned by quality teachers and unable to attract new qualified personnel. In the interviews, teachers repeatedly mentioned turnover as a serious problem, but its effect on teacher quality was not always clear:

> We've had a lot of turnover in the last seven years that I've been here, and I've been here for seven, but there's been a tremendous amount of turnover, teacher turnover, and I think that's more so based on frustration than anything else. I would still say that our faculty is very strong and there are a lot of good teachers in this building and there are a lot of teachers who care about the kids. (KY 40-02; eighth grade English)

Not all turnover was considered bad. Some teachers felt that "some people needed to go" because they "didn't add anything positive" (D-8). Others believed that after the exodus, only committed teachers were left who were prepared to tackle probation. Thus, staff turnover was seen a problem at most schools, but its interpretation was ambiguous in terms of the quality of exiting staff, and the connection between probation and staff turnover was not clearly drawn. Three items on the questionnaire helped us ascertain the quantitative proportions of teachers' perceptions on recruitment and retention problems at their schools.

The quantitative data do not show a clear pattern as to the effect of probation on faculty recruitment or retention. About a third of respondents believed that the school "has had a harder time attracting strong teachers as new hires since it has become probationary," but another third denied there is such problem. Similarly, about a third of respondents (35 percent) noticed that "teachers from this faculty try to transfer to other schools that are not [probationary]." But this did not necessarily mean that "more good teachers have been leaving than weaker ones since the school became [probationary]." On this item, respondents were evenly split, i.e. only about one third of respondents saw this problem while two thirds were either neutral or denied it. Maryland teachers, faced with lower commitment and higher teacher turnover, expressed more concern about retention and recruitment issues than Kentucky teachers. The same was true for middle school teachers as compared to elementary school teachers. Not surprisingly, teachers who trusted colleagues' skill and knowledge observed fewer problems of recruiting or retaining good teachers in their schools. Thus, judging from respondents' perceptions, the picture on recruitment and retention in the eleven probationary schools is not conclusive. Respondents were fairly equally split among those that saw a problem, those that didn't, and those that were neutral on the issue. There was greater concern among teachers from the Maryland schools, but the response patterns were not unequivocal.2

In summary, teacher commitment to staying at their school on probation was rather low across all eleven schools. Commitment was less of a problem in the Kentucky schools compared to the Maryland schools, where over half of the surveyed staff was not sure about staying at their job. Reasons for staying and leaving differed as well according to state. In the Maryland schools, top reasons for staying were hope and challenge around the schools' performance situation; among the Kentucky teachers it was the interaction with colleagues, students, and administrators. Positive energy as a result of probation was not among the top reasons. For teachers from the Kentucky schools, pressure from the school's probationary status was the top reason for leaving; in the Maryland schools top reasons were exit options and general doubts about the school's prospects.

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2 A very similar pattern obtains for the schools' reputation among parents. There is no clear agreement among teachers on whether probation tarnished the reputation of the school among parents.

7. Levels of Performance Motivation and Commitment

Teachers across the eleven schools tended to think of themselves as skillful instructors who were willing to take directions from the accountability system. They wished to overcome the stigma of probation and prove to the public their professional worth. However, they doubted the system's validity, fairness, and realism, and were prepared to leave their schools in large proportions. How does this pattern hold up when we compare groups with reportedly different performance motivation and commitment levels with each other? Is higher reported performance motivation and commitment associated with more or less external pressure and direction? Is the accountability system more meaningful in the eyes of more highly motivated performers? That is, do they value accountability more? Are they more confident of their capacity to accomplish their goals and have higher expectations of success? Are they encouraged by specific workplace conditions?

So far our analysis has primarily been based on data from interviews and descriptive statistics. In this section, we conduct bivariate analyses testing associations between levels of performance motivation, on one hand, and capacity, attitude, commitment, and workplace interaction variables, on the other hand, that were introduced in the previous sections. A similar analysis is conducted for different levels of commitment. Analyses of variance measuring the strength of particular factors associated with different performance motivation and commitment levels will throw further light on the motivational dynamics of probation. We use respondents' reports on their engagement and exerted effort as proxies for performance motivation.

Engagement

In the survey, we asked respondents to rate the effect probation had on their work at school. A strong effect was felt by about 40 percent of responding educators; roughly another third reported some effect of probation. The figures were fairly similar across the two states. Thus, a fairly large percentage of teachers at the eleven schools (about three fourths) felt that their work was affected by probation in some way.

Measuring another dimension of personal effects of probation, we asked educators at the eleven sites about their degree of involvement in activities related to probation and school improvement. Such involvement, according to our sample, was fairly high. Almost one half of respondents from either state saw themselves as highly involved; an additional third said they were at least somewhat involved. One needs to keep in mind, however, that our sample is biased towards teacher activists. About half of the teachers who returned the questionnaire reported that they held some kind of leadership position in their school, i.e. they were involved as administrators, committee chairs, union representatives, test coordinators, etc. Only a small portion of respondents (7 to 10 percent depending on state) reported being involved solely as classroom teachers without any additional function at school. For teachers who held leadership positions at school, involvement was even higher. Their ‘high involvement’ climbed to 68 percent.
By cross-tabulating the variables ‘involvement in school improvement/probation activities’ with ‘job effects of probation’ we composed three groups of teachers: one group was highly involved in probation-related improvement activities and highly affected in their work, a second group was somewhat involved and affected; and a third

group was fairly uninvolved and only weakly affected. The proportion of highly involved and affected, i.e. those that were most intensely reached by probation is about 25 percent. The combination of 'involved' and 'affected' is defined as engagement.

By comparison to less engaged teacher groups, analysis of variance shows that highly engaged teachers had more work experience. The difference between the least engaged and the most engaged was about seven years on the average. Hence senior teachers were more engaged as a result of probation. Highly engaged teachers saw themselves as more professional, efficacious, and skillful to master accountability expectations (see Table III.6). The differences in these measures of capacity perception were largest between the highly and moderately engaged teachers. Highly engaged teachers also placed a higher value on external performance goals. Probation moved them into action, though they did not consider the accountability system as more valid, fair, or realistic than their less engaged counterparts in a statistically significant way. They were, however, more optimistic about the school's prospects of improvement. Highly engaged teachers were not more committed to their school than their less engaged colleagues in a statistically significant way. In other words, they were as likely to leave their school as were less active teachers. A very strong difference between moderately and highly engaged was their reception of direction from the accountability system. Thus, it appears that high engagement was less a result of teachers' personal belief in the rightfulness of the system as it was driven by external demands, steered by external mechanisms and motivated by concerns for one's professional reputation. Fairly large differences in feeling anxious about one's career prospects among the three engagement groups undergird this sense of external pressure.

The analysis of school site factors corroborates this pattern. Mean differences among engagement levels were significant for three out the four variables that capture conditions of social interaction among educators at the sites. By far the strongest difference was obtained for principal enforcement while principal support made less of a difference. Positive collegial relationships made a difference for engagement levels while differences for burden-sharing were statistically insignificant. The principal sticks out as the one who facilitated the enforcement of external policies at the school site. In summary, high engagement in probation in the eleven schools was associated with higher sense of professional capacity, higher importance of test scores and public reputation, higher external directedness and anxiety, more principal enforcement and collegial and principal support. Belief in the validity, fairness, and realism of the accountability system, generally held in doubt by large numbers of respondents, was not more strongly developed among highly engaged teachers, though optimism related to the school's prospect of improvement was. But, as we saw earlier, for many teachers performance success was not necessarily associated with the performance criteria of the system.

Table III.6 - Factors Associated with Levels of Engagement in Probation

	Perceived Effects on Individual Teachers			*F* value
	Least Affected	Moderately Affected	Strongly Affected	
	N =18 (8.3%)	*N* = 146 (67.0%)	*N*= 54 (24.8%)	
		Mean [a]		
Teaching experience (yrs: max. = 36 yrs)	8.1	12.5	15.2	3.61*
Tenure at current school (yrs: max. = 27 yrs)	4.8	6.0	7.7	1.89
Commitment	-.49	-.02	.12	2.26
Importance of goals	-.80	-.08	.30	8.47***
Validity of assessment	.13	-.02	-.03	.20
(Un)Fairness	.21	-.05	.22	1.51
(Un)Realism	.22	.05	-.15	1.03
Expectation of success	-.73	-.01	.08	4.62*
Direction	-.13	-.16	.59	12.28***
Wake up call	-.43	.02	-.03	1.57
Anxious	-.70	.08	.004	5.03**
Shape up	.38	-.07	.004	1.46
Professionalism	-.05	-.06	.33	3.17*
Efficacy	-.16	-.15	.32	4.02*
Skills of self	-.05	-.08	.35	3.86*
Skills of colleagues	-.41	-.01	.20	2.45
Collegiality	-.76	.08	.17	5.96**
Principal enforcement	-1.02	-.02	.36	12.44***
Principal support	-.55	.07	.12	3.16*
(Non)Burden-sharing	.51	-.03	-.18	2.85

***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ [a] Means are standardized except those concerning work experience.

Differences between the highly engaged and the less engaged were particularly strong with regard to importance of external performance goals, direction, principal enforcement, and feeling anxious about one's career prospects. Thus, a combination of external and internal pressures and directions may have loomed large in teachers' decision to become engaged; such engagement appeared to be strongly driven by external forces and internal hierarchies. Induced externally, it flowed less from personal meanings. In all likelihood, the hierarchical pattern was more pronounced in the Maryland schools where the proportions of educators perceiving their faculties as collegial were smaller and perceiving their principals as exacting enforcers were larger. On the other hand, the proportion of educators feeling more anxious about their career was higher in the four Kentucky schools where exit options were not as plentiful.

Work Effort

One proclaimed goal of probation is the raising of work effort. Do respondents feel they are working harder and longer as a result of probation? In this area, agreement among respondents was fairly high; 68 percent sensed that teachers worked harder as a result of probation, but only about half noted an increase in their own work hours. Perceived increased workload for teachers at the school was positively associated with increased work hours for oneself ($r = .32^{**}$). Whether due to more intense workload or extended work hours, teachers' sense of increased work effort was fairly pervasive for the eleven-school sample.

By cross-tabulating the variables 'work effort' with 'work hours' we composed three groups of teachers. We defined these three groups as having exerted strong, moderate, and little effort due to probation (see Table III.7). On the survey, the plurality of respondents indicated that they exerted strong effort. Only about 15 percent of the sample reported little effort. Analysis of variance testing the relationship between work effort and various capacity, disposition , and school condition variables shows that on the average teachers with more work experience and more seniority in their school reportedly exerted more effort due to probation. Respondents who perceived themselves as more professional, efficacious, or skillful did not exert more effort than respondents whose perception of their capacity was lower. But for this eleven-school sample, it made a big difference for work effort whether teachers considered their colleagues skillful in meeting the system's performance expectations. Differences among the three effort categories were even larger with regard to collegial relationships. In fact, collegial relationships, firstly, and perception of group capacity, secondly, differed more strongly with regard to exertion of effort than any of the other measures displayed in Table III.7, with the exception of anxiety. Feeling anxious about one's career prospects also made a relatively big difference for those exerting large effort compared to those exerting little.

Table III.7 - Factors Associated with Levels of Work Effort Due to Probation

	Perceived Effects on Individual Teachers			
	Exerted Little Effort	Exerted Moderate Effort	Exerted Strong Effort	*F* value
	N =39 (14.7%)	*N* = 106 (40.0%)	*N*= 120 (45.3%)	
		Mean [a]		
Teaching experience (yrs: max. = 36 yrs)	10.7	10.9	14.3	3.66*
Tenure at current school (yrs: max. = 27 yrs)	5.6	5.1	7.6	4.51*
Commitment	-.12	.02	.04	.32
Importance of goals	-.20	-.03	.06	1.00
Validity of assessment	.06	.11	-.17	2.24
(Un)Fairness	-.24	-.19	.28	7.14**
(Un)Realism	-.24	-.15	.23	5.21**
Expectation of success	-.36	.11	-.03	2.98
Direction	-.25	-.16	.18	4.60*
Wake up call	-.39	.12	.06	4.00*
Anxious	-.65	-.11	.32	16.84***
Shape up	.14	.16	-.16	3.17*
Professionalism	-.06	.01	.03	.12
Efficacy	.04	.09	-.12	1.15
Skills of self	-.20	-.09	.11	1.76
Skills of colleagues	-.58	-.14	.28	12.59***
Collegiality	-.98	-.07	.37	29.34***
Principal enforcement	-.66	.03	.14	8.70***
Principal support	-.59	-.003	.14	6.76**
(Non)Burden-sharing	.66	.11	-.30	14.16***

***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ [a] Means are standardized except those concerning work experience.

If the accountability system was a strong motivator, we would expect teachers who reportedly exerted strong work effort to hold the accountability system in higher esteem, i.e. consider it more important, valid, fair, and realistic, than those that exerted little effort. This was not the case. On the contrary, the three levels of effort were not significantly different in terms of beliefs about goal importance and validity of the system. For fairness and realism, mean differences even pointed in the opposite direction. That is, teachers who said they exerted strong effort believed in larger proportions that the accountability was unfair and unrealistic. Hence, the accountability system was not more meaningful for those that exerted more effort as a result of probation. In summary, those that exerted more effort did not have a higher sense of capacity, nor did they attach more personal meaning to the accountability system. They were also not more optimistic about their school's improvement prospects, nor were they significantly more committed to their school. However, they perceived the accountability system as more directive, felt more anxious about their career, tended to see their principal as more exacting and supportive, but first and foremost, they cherished collegial relationships at school more than those who report less effort.

Thus far, we have investigated the influence of perceptions of individual and organizational capacity and dispositions towards accountability on educators' reported performance motivation levels due to probation. Work performance motivation was indicated by levels of engagement and effort. We found that for the eleven-school sample both high engagement and high effort were associated with a stronger sense of being directed by the accountability system. Higher levels of work performance were not associated with higher educational meanings of the accountability system. Either such meaning did not differ significantly according to performance level or was actually more negative for higher performance levels (as in the case of effort). Probation reached senior teachers more intensely than less-senior ones. Sense of personal capacity played a role in engagement, but did not make a difference for levels of effort. Of the affective responses tested here, feeling anxious made a fairly big difference against which others paled in significance. School site conditions played a key role in shaping responses to probation. In looking at both measures of performance, collegial relationships and the principal as an enforcer of policies showed large discrepancies across performance levels, the former for effort, the latter for engagement.

From Tables III.6 and III.7, we can now construct a profile of a teacher who is likely to react to probation favorably and increase his or her level of engagement and effort. As compared to reportedly less motivated performers, such a teacher is further advanced in his or her career and may have higher seniority at her school. She feels highly directed by the accountability system, but at the same time she is skeptical about the system's value and her prospects of success in it. She increases her performance, not because she values the goals and standards of the accountability system or strongly expects to reap rewards, but because she feels compelled by (mild) external pressure, is concerned about her public reputation as a professional, and is motivated by characteristics of her work group. Her relatively high level of performance motivation due to probation, however, is not associated with a higher commitment to her school on probation. She wavers between reaffirming her commitment to her school or contemplating exit.

Job Commitment

We saw earlier that teachers' commitment to staying at their workplace was overall low, particularly across the seven Maryland schools although we could not find a clear relationship between the school's probation status and teachers' disposition to leave. For some, probation clearly was a reason to leave -- see the mass exodus in some of the Maryland schools and the sentiments of Kentucky teachers --, but for others it served as a challenge to stay and prove their professional worth. We have also seen in the previous section that more motivated teachers, i.e. those that were more disposed to becoming engaged and exerting more effort, were not more strongly committed to staying. Here we are asking what probation-related factors (of the ones introduced so far) do make a difference for highly committed teachers. Knowing these factors is of utmost importance in a situation in which many teachers report being more strongly motivated by external pressure and internal social capacities of the school than by the personal meaning attached to accountability.

Table III.8 shows that more committed teachers in the eleven-school sample had an average of four more years of work experience, while the length of tenure at their school was of less relevance for their commitment. None of the measures with which we captured belief in individual capacity was significantly different across commitment levels. That is, committed and uncommitted teachers were as likely to consider themselves as professional, efficacious, and skillful. This finding does not come as a surprise in light of interview data from the Maryland schools that showed similarities with regard to commitment between seasoned and novice teachers. While there was little difference between uncommitted and highly committed respondents in their assessment of one's own capacity, differences were striking when respondents assessed their colleagues' skills in meeting the performance expectations of the system. Highly committed teachers in the sample held a higher opinion of their colleagues' skills compared to uncommitted ones; that is, they saw themselves surrounded by more skillful colleagues. This finding points to the importance of group factors for teachers' job commitment.

Respondents who were more strongly committed to their school on probation had a more positive outlook on the accountability system. They attached greater importance to the goals of raising test scores and exiting probation, and they deemed the system as more fair and realistic than their less committed colleagues. A more dramatic difference than the realism of the system's performance goals was teachers' expectations that their school would improve in the near future. Thus, teachers who were strongly committed to their school on probation believed more strongly that accountability goals were attainable and even more strongly that their school was equipped to make improvements. Whether teachers felt directed by the system made a small, but statistically significant difference while there was no significance in any of the affective response ratings with regard to commitment level (not displayed here).

Table III.8 - Factors Associated with Job Commitment

	Perceived Effects on Individual Teachers			
	Not Committed	Weakly Committed or Undecided	Strongly Committed	*F* value
	N =73 (27.5%)	*N* = 57 (21.5%)	*N* =135 (50.95%)	
		Mean ^{a}		
Teaching experience (yrs: max. = 36 yrs)	10.3	10.9	14.4	4.62*
Tenure at current school (yrs: max. = 27 yrs)	5.4	5.3	6.7	1.64
Importance of goals	-.31	-.12	.15	4.92**
Validity of assessment	-.14	-.08	.05	.96
(Un)Fairness	.31	.05	-.17	5.25**
(Un)Realism	.34	-.05	-.10	4.55*
Expectation of improvement	-.57	-.18	.37	25.47***
Direction	-.21	-.23	.15	4.09*
Professionalism	-.08	-.19	.11	2.08
Efficacy	-.23	-.08	.10	2.44
Skills of self	-.08	-.24	.11	2.52
Skills of colleagues	-.31	-.15	.29	9.67***
Collegiality	-.30	-.17	.28	9.14***
Principal enforcement	-.36	.02	.20	7.29**
Principal support	-.54	-.06	.32	18.48***
(Non)Burden-sharing	.37	.01	-.25	9.12***

***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$ ^{a}:Means are standardized except those concerning work experience

A look at organizational capacities show that more committed respondents perceived their faculties to be more collegial and more prone to share the burden of school improvement and perceived their principals as more supportive and exacting compared to respondents in the less committed categories. Differences among the more and less committed groups were particularly strong in the areas of principal support and expectation of improvement. Thus, optimism about improvements and support received from the principal strongly distinguished committed teachers from less committed ones. Collegial relationships (i.e. burden-sharing, skills of colleagues, and collegiality) made a difference as well. School-site related factors were a strong marker that distinguished the committed from the less committed.

Teachers committed to staying at their school on probation, first and foremost, had a positive outlook on their close-up situation, indicated by expectation of school improvement, principal support, collegiality, and perceived skills of their colleagues to master the performance demands of the system. They were more senior and believed more strongly in the importance, fairness, and realism of the accountability system, and they felt slightly more directed by the system. But their sense of capacity was not necessarily higher than that of less committed or uncommitted teachers. Both groups saw their quality as teachers in a similar light. Interview data corroborate these patterns. Those who said they would stay repeatedly referred to two reasons: the feeling of being needed by this particular student population and colleagues at the sites. Commitment to the organization may have had more to do with perceptions of social characteristics of the school and dependable social relationships than with personal characteristics of skill and capacity.

Our data clearly shows that a serious teacher commitment problem exists across the eleven schools. Probation was the number one reason for teachers to leave in the four Kentucky schools, but commitment was higher there compared to the seven Maryland schools. Teachers drew a connection between turnover and probation, but many other factors seemed to play a role in the decision to leave, prominently among them exit options and a general sense of crisis in the school. School site conditions were key factors associated with higher commitment, most notably optimism about the schools' success in the near future and a supportive principal. Our data cannot conclusively answer whether probation drives the "wrong" teachers out of the schools. But evidence from both the qualitative and quantitative data suggests that highly motivated and skillful teachers were as prone to leave as their less engaged and skillful colleagues. Probation did capture the imagination of some highly motivated teachers who responded positively to performance pressures, but it also turned many of them off. Those for whom the accountability system was more personally meaningful tended to also be more committed.

8. Part III Summary: Teachers' Responses to Probation

Part III examined individual responses to probation. If teachers increased their work performance, did they do so because they are primarily motivated by the goals and rewards of the accountability system, by external mandates and pressures, or by individual and organizational capacities? Are the ones that reportedly increased work effort and engagement also the ones who are more strongly committed to staying at their school? Probation may be wholly ineffective or it may produce performance effects in educators through a dynamic of coercion, compliance, reward calculus, or internalization of system goals. These dynamics can be arrayed in a continuum from more self-directed to more other-directed action. Of most benefit to the school would be a dynamic of self-directed action since teachers are largely autonomous actors in their classrooms. In Part III, we explored these dynamics by looking at educators' interpretation of the signal, explanations of decline, perceptions of the accountability system, sense of individual and organizational capacity, and commitment.

In a more other-directed dynamic, educators would perceive probation primarily as a punitive threat that either instilled anxiety or defiance in them. Though highly aware of the public stigma of failure, they would disqualify the goals of the accountability system and deny any fault on their part in their failure analysis. Internal divisions between groups of anxious and defiant educators would diminish the strength of collegial relationships. Stigmatization, official mandates and pressures, and strong internal pressure imposed by the administration over a fairly de-motivated staff would compel educators to respond to performance demands, but at the same to contemplate exit options.

If probation unleashed a more self-directed dynamic, educators at schools on probation would be aware of probation and accept it as a challenge. They would understand the mechanics of the accountability system so that they could realistically assess what actions would lead to success. In search for steps to improve, their failure analysis would be tied to their own and the school's performance shortcomings, though they would be confident of their capacity to remedy shortcomings. This is not to say that they wouldn't also be aware of forces from the social and political environment that shape their work. They would value the accountability goals as expressions of their own educational goals, perhaps in conjunction with their expectation to reap the rewards the system bestows on them, such as exit of probation, meeting the school's growth target, public recognition, or monetary reward. At the workplace, the leadership of the principal, by providing support and structure, and collegial relationships, particularly norms of burden-sharing and group accountability, would buttress the goals of the accountability system. External direction and pressure may strengthen the striving for accountability goals, but they would not be germane. Highly motivated educators who become engaged and increase work effort would also maintain their commitment to staying at their workplace to see the school through tough times.

A scenario halfway between coercive, other directed and internalized self-directed dynamics could be constructed in the following way. Probation would not be interpreted as either threat, but as mild challenge and a resource deficiency status. That is, probation would signal the need for help, rather than a call to wake up or shape up performance. Teachers would disqualify the value of accountability goals, but find exiting probation important in order to avoid public stigma and also increase student learning. In their failure analysis, educators would externalize causes of decline, but concede that performance ought to improve in tandem with infusions of new resources. Some would take up the performance challenge despite misgivings about its righfulness, others would reject it. External authoritative mandates as well as principals as enforcers of policies would direct a work force that was compliant, but largely oblivious to the specific demands of the accountability system. Relationships with colleagues would encourage staff to work towards school improvements, though the goals of the accountability system would be of lesser relevance and burden-sharing not wide-spread. Rather, the lion's share of the work would fall to relatively small groups of highly engaged teachers that respond positively to the performance pressures, but their engagement would not necessarily make them more committed to the organization.

With the data analyzed so far, we can see that the situation across the eleven schools comes closest to the latter scenario. Teachers from the eleven schools on probation described themselves as generally aware of probation. Large proportions believed they had a fairly good understanding of what this status entailed, but detailed knowledge about the mechanics of the accountability system was scarce. Affective responses to the signal varied with no clear pattern discernible for the majority of study participants. For a plurality it increased anxiety, for others it was a wake-up call or an authoritative signal sent to the profession to shape up. Among the Maryland schools, the strength of the signal wore off as schools lingered in the status of probation. In the interviews, educators described how fear and dejection lifted as they found ways to distance themselves from the label of failure. Teachers' failure analysis was de-personalized. Performance problems of the school were largely attributed to external sources or, to a lesser degree, to the failings of some co-workers or administrators who admittedly could have done a better job. Some defied the state's action, doubting its superior capacity to make a difference. But overall, the state could rely on widespread willingness to comply regardless of teachers' judgment. Many hoped that probation is not punitive, but would result in more resources and support for the school.

Earlier, we hypothesized that teachers' sense of capacity, their expectation of success in the accountability system, the value they place on the system and the rewards it bestows, as well as the direction provided by it, influence their responses to probation. The study shows that educators in these eleven schools thought of themselves as highly professional, capable, efficacious, and skillful, though many of them lacked long work experience. If probation was to make teachers take a second look at what they were doing, it failed its message with many of the teachers who participated in the study. At the same time, confidence in one's skills to adequately respond to the demands of the accountability system was high.

Many teachers considered it important for the school to improve its performance and rid itself of the probation label. Many teachers also said they were guided by the accountability system in their work. But beyond that, a large majority of teachers possessed serious misgivings about the system. It was perceived as unfair to their schools and unrealistic in its goals and its assumptions about solutions to the problem of low performance. The assessments were not widely accepted as valid gauges of quality teaching. Doubts prevailed about the calculation of scores and the wisdom of overly ambitious performance-based standards. Teachers were more prone to evaluate themselves based on observable behavior and reactions from students and other adults at school than based on the state's assessments. Personalization, incrementalism, and a basic skills orientation prevailed over data-drivenness, ambitious growth targets, and performance-based pedagogy. The gap between the states' demands, on one hand, and the needs of the students and the reality of the schools, on the other hand, was strongly felt. For the most part, educators in these schools derived meaning for their work from sources other than the accountability system that has unfairly declared them failures.

Thus, teachers heeded the system but refrained from more thorough buy-in that would make the accountability system a meaningful vehicle for self-reflection and proactive improvement. Commitment to one's school was weakly developed. Probation was a strong reason for the desire to leave in the Kentucky schools, but less important in the Maryland schools where exit options and a more general sense of malaise about one's school prevailed. Those who chose to stay were motivated more by a general acceptance of challenge rather than an upsurge of energy due to probation.

Considering high sense of capacity, low commitment to the probationary school, and widespread rejection of the accountability system as a valid gauge of one's work performance, probation can be seen as having limited effects on individual teachers. On the other hand, probation policies could bank on a majority of teachers who wished their students to perform better, who wanted to overcome the public stigma of failure, and who paid attention to the system.

A large number of respondents from the eleven schools felt they were highly involved in school improvement and probation activities. This number may be inflated by response patterns to the questionnaire that over-represent leaders and activists in our sample. Moreover, the sentiment was fairly pervasive that, as a result of probation, teachers boosted their work effort. Large numbers of teachers said that probation had affected their work.

Teachers' buoyancy regarding their involvement, effort, and the overall impact of probation contrasted with a much dimmer view of probation effects when asked about specifics. Only about one fifth of our already biased sample said they were highly involved in probation-related activities and at the same time highly affected by probation in their work. This is a small activist base for the success of school improvement, but about half of the sample said that they increased work effort and work hours. We found that for the eleven-school sample both high engagement and high effort were associated with a stronger sense of being directed by the accountability system. Higher levels of performance motivation indicated by engagement and effort were not associated with a higher sense of personal meaningfulness of the accountability system. Either accountability-related beliefs and attitudes did not differ significantly according to performance motivation level or they were actually more negative for higher reported performance motivation levels (as in the case of effort). Optimism about the school's prospect of improvement was more strongly present among the highly engaged, but this did not mean that the accountability system was seen as more realistic. Probation had a stronger effect on more senior teachers' performance, though sense of personal capacity did not consistently show up as a significant difference.

It appears that the highly engaged were as likely to leave their schools as the less engaged, but the effect of the school's status on teacher commitment was not clear-cut. Probation was not a coercive threat, but a milder nuisance that did not necessarily scare all those away that had exit options. Accepted as a challenge, it mobilized some teachers. But in many cases, those that answered to external pressures by increasing work performance were also the ones who felt alienated from the accountability system and contemplated leaving. Teachers for whom the accountability system was personally meaningful were also more strongly committed to their school on probation.

Thus, whereas accountability systems can perhaps trigger more engagement and work effort in many teachers through the imposition of probation without generating more deeply felt acceptance of the system's goals, standards, and judgments, such a strategy may fall flat in maintaining job commitment among pressured or challenged teachers. To enhance their willingness to stay, the accountability system should be advised to develop ways of measuring school performance that are personally meaningful. That is, measures that are fair, valid, and realistic, in the eyes of teachers despite their current performance status.

Across the interviews, common responses among teachers were striking, suggesting to us that there exists a groundswell of consensus on many issues. But three sub-groups stand out. First, there is the group of novice teachers. Although numerous at the school sites, they were actually under-represented in our interview and survey sample. Not surprisingly, novice teachers tended to be preoccupied with the day-to-day challenges of classroom management and daily lesson plans against which concerns for the whole school, such as probation, pale. Some novice teachers were told up-front that their new assignment was a school on probation, but many of them did not pay attention or knew the relevance of this designation. Secondly, there is the small group of activists. This group often consisted of career teachers, i.e. teachers that strive to move up in the school system hierarchy. Frequently these career teachers were at least partially released from the classroom. In many schools, career teachers and activists expended an enormous amount of energy on school improvement. Though often in agreement with their less-involved colleagues in viewing the accountability system as unfair to the school, they more readily accepted the challenge of increasing test scores and criticized their colleagues' instruction. Thirdly, there are the principals. The situation of principals under probation was quite different from that of teachers. Maryland principals, in particular, were calculated that the prospect of keeping their position depended on their ability to raise their school's performance scores.

What is missing? It seems that fundamentally teachers in the eleven schools on probation did not buy into the accountability system. Many of them, more or less motivated ones alike, were skeptical about the goals, felt unfairly judged by the system, and did not judge themselves according to the standards of the system. It is not surprising, then, that almost nobody in these schools supported the status quo of the current accountability design in either state. Probation motivated teachers because of a general desire to increase student performance and to shed the public stigma of failure. School-specific social factors contributed as well. To a large degree, mild pressures and directives issuing from the authority of the system in conjunction with social capacities at the work place molded teachers' responses to probation, with the principal being the system's conduit. The result was that probation, by itself, did not trigger much self-directed action on the part of the great majority of teachers. How this motivational pattern shapes what schools actually do under the auspices of probation is the topic of the following chapters.

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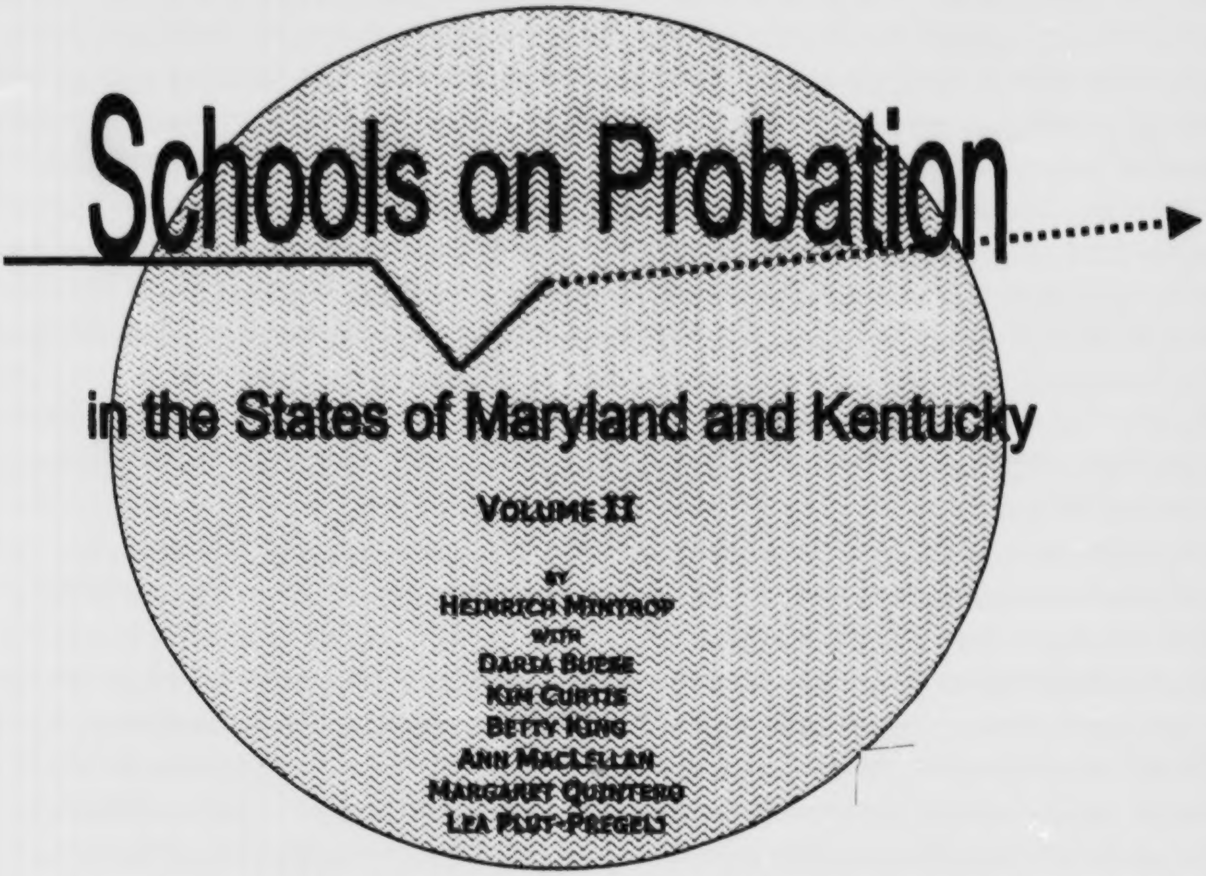

Schools on Probation

in the States of Maryland and Kentucky

VOLUME II

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TECHNICAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO
THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FIELD INITIATED STUDY:
THE EFFECT OF RECONSTITUTION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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PART IV. ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO PROBATION

What organizations do depends on what individuals think and do (Senge, 1990; Schein, 1997). Thus, organizational responses to probation are intertwined with educators' willingness to increase work effort and their capacity to change classroom instruction. In Part III, we focused our attention on individual performance motivation and commitment. In Part IV, our emphasis shifts from individual beliefs and attitudes to social interactions and strategies. We have already examined patterns of social interaction and their relationship to individual beliefs and attitudes in Part III. Here we describe how probation shaped interactions and strategies school-wide.

In high-stakes accountability systems the threat of sanctions is to evoke heightened concerns for low performance among school staff. In the two accountability systems studied here, whole schools, rather than individuals, are held responsible, and it is the staff as a performance unit that is to master the crisis of the organization. Deliberately induced crisis and group accountability are the main motivational levers imbued in probation designs to move schools as organizations forward, but these levers are embedded in other design features that are to make the organization more effective. These features are programmatic and managerial mandates and supports for local capacity building. We examine how the mix of threats and supports, which varies between Kentucky and Maryland, shapes social interactions and improvement strategies at schools.

To the degree that probation is perceived as a crisis of the organization, schools could respond in several ways, as elaborated in Part I. Schools could try to master the crisis by engaging in organizational learning, or learning could be blocked. In schools that respond to probation with organizational learning, we would find teachers proactively and voluntarily involved in professional development and individual and team learning. We would encounter dialog between staff and administration around performance goals and strategies. We would detect an awareness of educators' contribution to the schools' performance problems, and we would see at least some improvement strategies developed from unique site needs and tailored to site and individual classroom conditions. Alternatively, the organization may rigidify its operations and try to master the crisis by falling back on well-established routines. If these routines measure up to the performance challenge, the organization will weather the crisis successfully; if not, it may disintegrate instead. In a rigidified organization, traditional hierarchies become reinforced. Conformity and obeisance prevail over dialog. Dissension and conflict is suppressed. Strategies follow the logic of managerial initiative and external compliance. When we investigate schools' social interactions and chosen strategies as responses to probation, patterns of organizational learning and organizational rigidity serve as opposite ends of a heuristic continuum.

Our analysis of individual responses to probation showed that probation in the eleven schools was a fairly weak tool in motivating teachers to self-directed action. An exception was the small group of highly engaged career teachers and principals. Rather, performance increases (in engagement and effort) seemed to be more strongly associated with external pressure, internal enforcement of policies, and collegial relationships at schools. Despite a sense of relatively strong collegial relationships across the eleven schools, probation does not seem to have resulted in a widely perceived sense of burden-sharing as a sign of group accountability. Yet, it is quite conceivable that external pressure, internal vigilance of the principal, a small active core group of teachers, and a general sense of togetherness among staff in support of improvement and in defense of the school against a hostile external environment could move schools forward despite wide-spread rejection of the accountability system. If this were the case, then the change dynamic played out at school in response to probation would be rather externally driven and centered on the school administration. And it would be up to this interplay between administration, activist core, and a largely compliant, but relatively immobilized staff as to whether organizations learn or rigidify, which then may have serious repercussions for teachers' behavior in the semi-autonomous classroom space.

In Part IV, we examine this dynamic with the help of case studies in which we describe how interactions among educators unfolded and what strategies schools undertook during the periods of data collection (see Part I, Chapter 3 for data collection strategies). Part IV is subdivided into multiple sections. Considering the differences between the two accountability systems, Maryland and Kentucky schools will be handled separately. We begin with the analysis of the seven Maryland schools in the first three sections that contextualize the schools' performance challenge and summarize the seven case studies in terms of interactions and strategies. Then vignettes derived from the full case reports highlight differences among schools. A statistical analysis compares four Maryland schools, two of which we identified as moving, two as stuck (Rosenholtz,1987). This analysis serves to discern a relationship between the schools' responses to probation and teachers' perceptions of capacity, performance motivation, attitudes towards the accountability system, and views of social interactions at their schools. A subsequent section summarizes findings from the four Kentucky schools and compares these with the patterns found in the Maryland schools. The full case reports are attached at the end of this report, following Part VI.

1. The Challenge of Performance in the Seven Maryland Schools

The seven Maryland schools were selected according to a number of criteria, such as school type, duration in the probation program, district, educational load, and performance history. Four of the schools are middle schools, three are elementary schools. Four are located in District A, a large urban school district, three in District B, a suburban district with strong urban characteristics. Two of the schools, one elementary and one middle school, are veterans of the state's probationary system. They were identified in 1995, soon after the policy was enacted. Five of the schools were newly identified six months prior to data collection in 1998. One middle school was added to the selection in 1999 as a school with a decidedly positive performance record.

All seven Maryland schools on probation (called "reconstitution-eligible" or RE schools in the state's parlance) have a distinctly urban character. Three schools, one middle school and two elementary schools, are truly inner-city schools, that is, they are located in the midst or close to urban poverty and blight and their populations' poverty indicators are high. Percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunches are 70 percent and higher. Four schools are located at the edges of large cities. While their physical surroundings are more pleasant, their populations are for the most part bused in from poorer parts of their districts. One of the four, an elementary school, has a distinctly inner-city character despite its nominal suburban district locale. The three middle schools, located in the inner suburban ring around the city, are less impacted by poverty with between 40 and 60 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. All seven schools are almost exclusively attended by African American students.

Though impacted by poverty, high educational loads, and in some cases blighted neighborhoods, the RE schools we studied do not conform to the stereotype of a neglected urban school, broken and out of control, perhaps with the exception of one inner-city middle school whose dark hallways, menacing hall monitors, loitering students, and vandalized classrooms made it a forbidding place. For the most part, the schools studied have lobbies that are brightened with plants and colorful displays of students' projects, school spirit banners, recognition plaques, and trophies. Many classrooms we visited reflected the instructional program in the display of student work and gave evidence to the personal care teachers expended on creating a friendly environment. Nevertheless, almost all of the schools suffered from structural neglect. Most schools lacked proper ventilation, and many needed basic repairs. Two schools were severely overcrowded. For example, one elementary school, built in the 1960's for

350 students, had an enrollment of 651 students when it was identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1998. Thirteen portable classrooms were added to house the overflow. One middle school, also built in the 1960's as an elementary school, enlarged and renovated in 1973 to house 500 students, had 780 students by the time the school received the RE designation. In this school, much instruction took place in a severely overcrowded basement that was arranged as an open-classroom area dating back to its early years as an elementary school. Each school grappled with specific circumstances. Though urban in character, overwhelmingly attended by lower-SES African American students, and in need of physical repair, six of the seven schools were not unpleasant places thanks to visible efforts on the part of educators.

The Schools' Performance History

The Maryland state department of education designates schools as reconstitution-eligible that perform on a low level in absolute terms and that have a record of decline prior to identification. Among our sample of seven schools, a general pre-probationary performance profile emerges. Schools had average MSPAP scores that were lower than those of their respective districts and a general downward performance trend for their MSPAP composite indexes over a period of two to four years. In some instances, schools experienced sharp test score declines in the year preceding reconstitution-eligibility. In others, a pattern of persistent low performance is evident. However, one of the seven sample schools possessed scores exceeding its district average. Across the spectrum of the seven schools, seemingly a variety of criteria were used to select schools for probationary status.

A review of MSPAP performance among our sample schools during the post-probationary period finds that, in many respects, reconstitution-eligibility may first and foremost be a tool to arrest decline and stagnation in persistently failing schools. In this regard, the seven schools are similar to RE schools in Maryland as a whole (see Part II).

In general, probationary status has had a positive, albeit small, effect on these troubled and declining schools in the area of MSPAP achievement, the most weighty component in the state's school performance assessments. An examination of the schools' terminal grade MSPAP composite index scores[1] reveals that six of the seven schools demonstrated incremental improvement in the period between the year in which they were declared reconstitution-eligible and the year 2000, the latest year for which testing data is available. The average net gain for these scores was found to be just under nine percentage points over the whole period.

But if one looks at scores for reading and mathematics only, the results are more mixed. Formulated in a positive way, in the post-probationary period the seven schools were generally able to score at least as well as they did on the year's test for which they became reconstitution-eligible. That is, they did not decline further. However, improvement gains were very modest. This is the case for both the elementary and middle schools in the sample. A comparison of the scores for the reconstitution year and the year 2000 (the end of the study) reveals that all but one middle school made at least modest improvements on both their MSPAP reading and math scores since being labeled RE. A review of fifth grade scores for the three elementary schools in the sample shows that two of the three schools achieved at least slightly higher MSPAP math and reading scores than those obtained on the test for the year in which they were declared reconstitution-eligible (See Figures IV.1 and IV.2). In most instances reading gains did not exceed nine percentage points over the course of the reconstitution-eligible period (either six or three years depending on when the school was identified). With a net increase of 20.4 points over three years, just one school stood out as making exceptionally strong progress on its MSPAP reading achievement. In math, progress was even more modest, with gains generally not exceeding more than five percentage points over the same period.

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[1] The composite index is a statistic developed to provide an indication of the average performance of students across all six areas of the MSPAP test.

Interestingly, the general upward trend of the sample's math and reading scoring pattern camouflages some very strong year-to-year variations in MSPAP achievement for some schools, particularly at the elementary level. For example, in the three-year period between 1998 and 2000, one elementary school's math scores fluctuated from 7.5 to 25 to 15.8 percent of students scoring "satisfactory" on the state's MSPAP test. Similarly, during this same three-year period, another elementary school's math scores varied from 16.1 to 21.7 to 2 percent "satisfactory."

However, any discussion of these modest performance improvements must not obscure the schools' very poor actual performance on the MSPAP test. The sample's composite index scores, varying from the low single digits for some schools to the low 30s for one exceptionally high performer, generally lag below their districts' average and are well below the state average which, for both elementary and middle schools, has slowly climbed from the low to mid 40 percent range over the last five years. The gap between the seven schools' scores and the state's established goal of 70 percent satisfactory passing rate has remained large over the three years we analyzed.

While MSPAP is an assessment designed to test complex performances, the state also monitors student achievement in the area of basic skills through the Maryland Functional Test (MFT) taken at the end of middle school. While the MFTs in reading, writing, and math are included in the formula for the School Performance Index, the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), used as a basic skills test in elementary schools, was not included in the formula. Only recently has the state begun to pay more attention to the CTBS. An analysis of middle school MFT reading and mathematics scores found the gap between our sample's basic skills performance and the state's desired outcomes to be much smaller than that for the MSPAP test (see Figures IV.3 and IV.4).

In reading, our sample's scores remained relatively flat throughout the probationary period with two schools scoring slightly higher in 2000 than their MFT reading score at the time of probation and two schools scoring slightly lower. Nonetheless, three of the sample's four middle schools consistently exceeded the state's satisfactory MFT reading passing rate of 95 percent and the fourth school lagged behind by just six percentage points. The situation is less positive in the area of mathematics. Not one of the four middle schools met the state's satisfactory passing rate of 80 percent during the time of the study. However, in a number of years, three of the sample's schools came within 10 points of the state's satisfactory level. Interestingly, however, MFT math scores for three of the four middle schools were on a noticeable downward trend from the 70 percent range to the 60 percent range over the last four years. While a fourth school saw a steady rise in its math scores, its scores started out so low that even with close to a doubling of its passing rate, the school's scores still lagged behind those of the other three middle schools by approximately six percentage points.

In conclusion, while a few schools have made notable strides on the MSPAP test in the areas of math and reading since becoming reconstitution-eligible, for the majority, MSPAP performance in these key areas has been either modest or stagnant. In this respect, our sample resembles the patterns identified for the 1996 and 1998 cohorts of all RE schools in Maryland (see Part II). Additionally, a number of schools have been plagued with year-to-year score fluctuations that are inconsistent with the state's goal of continuous improvement. As with MSPAP, MFT scores for the seven reconstitution-eligible schools have remained largely flat in reading and are actually declining in math. Thus, while the sample's relatively high performance on the MFT reading and mathematics tests gives an indication that they are succeeding in imparting basic skills to their students on a level that is more on par with state expectations, it does not appear that their status as RE schools has coincided with performance improvements in the basic skills area.

Whether MSPAP or MFT scores are adequate measures of a school's performance from year to year is not our concern here.[2] We treat the tests as tools with which the state authoritatively communicates to teachers what it values the most and what it expects teachers to focus on in their work. While the ups and downs of yearly test scores might not give us an accurate picture of school performance, it may give us an approximate measure of whether schools have heeded the accountability agency's call. In the next sections, we will take a closer look at the seven schools' responses to probation. While we do not intend to causally explain the schools' performance on the state assessments, we use a school's test scores as one important data point that contributes to our understanding of what schools do under conditions of probation. As we saw, across the seven schools, improvements have been modest to flat, though a few schools managed to post some impressive gains for some years. Hence, our analysis is challenged to do two things: understand the overall flat performance of the seven schools that resembles the performance of the majority of schools on probation in Maryland; and identify those conditions and responses that coincide with performance improvement and that might have had a positive impact on the schools' test scores.

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[2] We are not aware of any published study of the tests' validity or margins of error.

Figure IV.1 - Fifth Grade Reading MSPAP 1993-2000

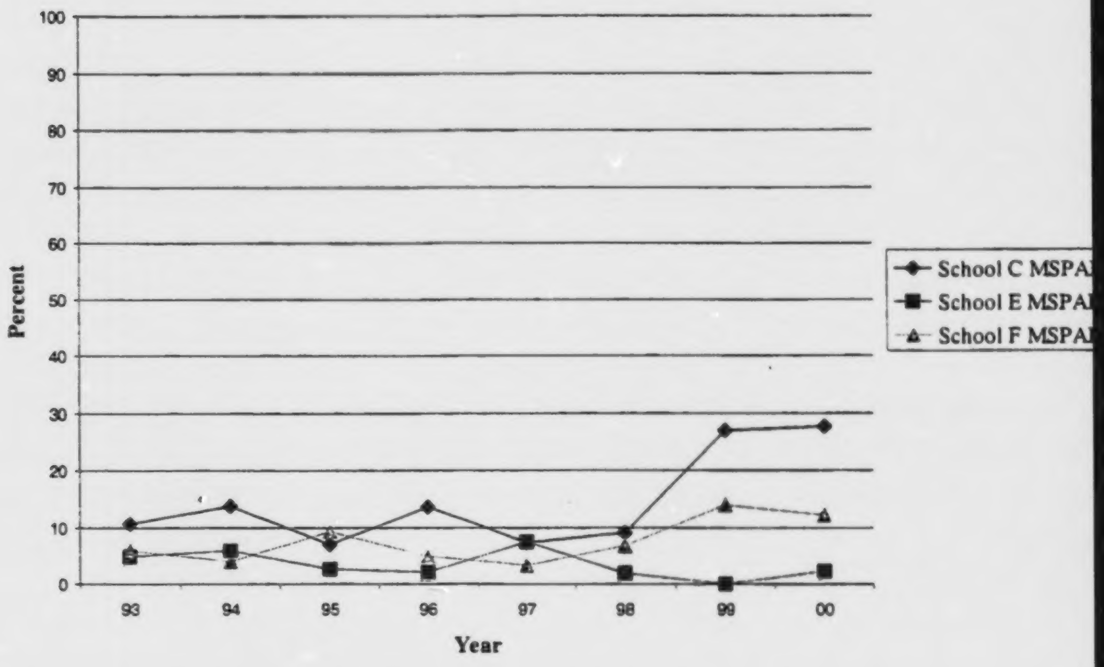


Figure IV.2 - Fifth Grade Math MSPAP 1993-2000

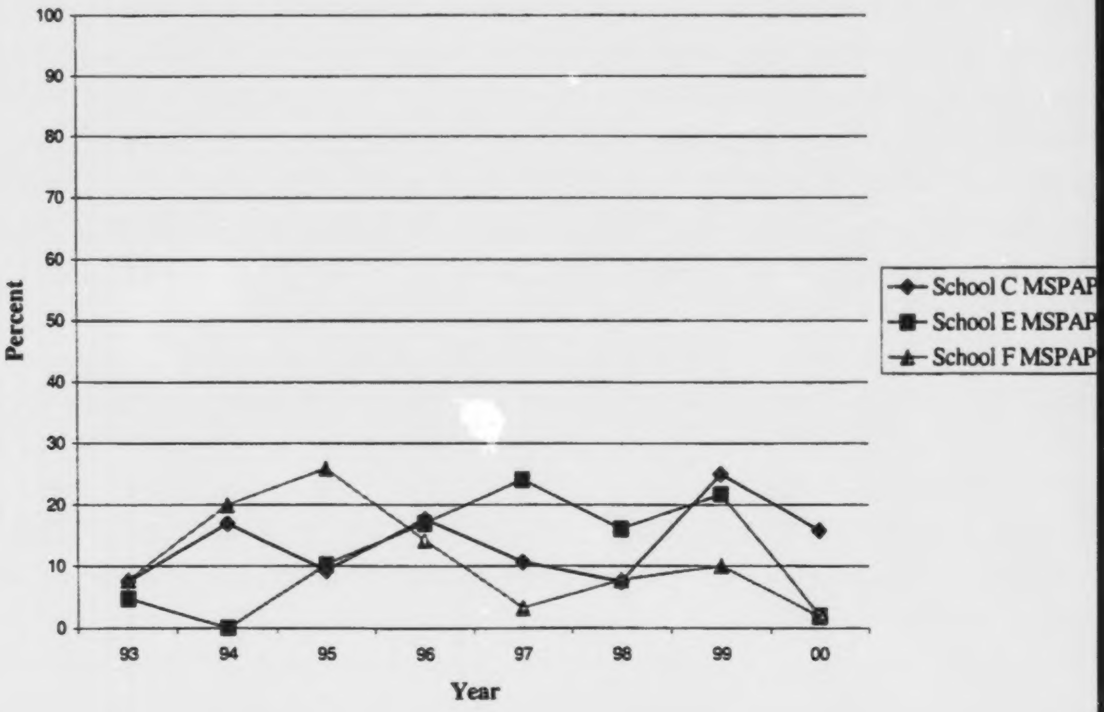


Figure IV.3 - Eighth Grade Reading MSPAP v. MFT 1993-2000

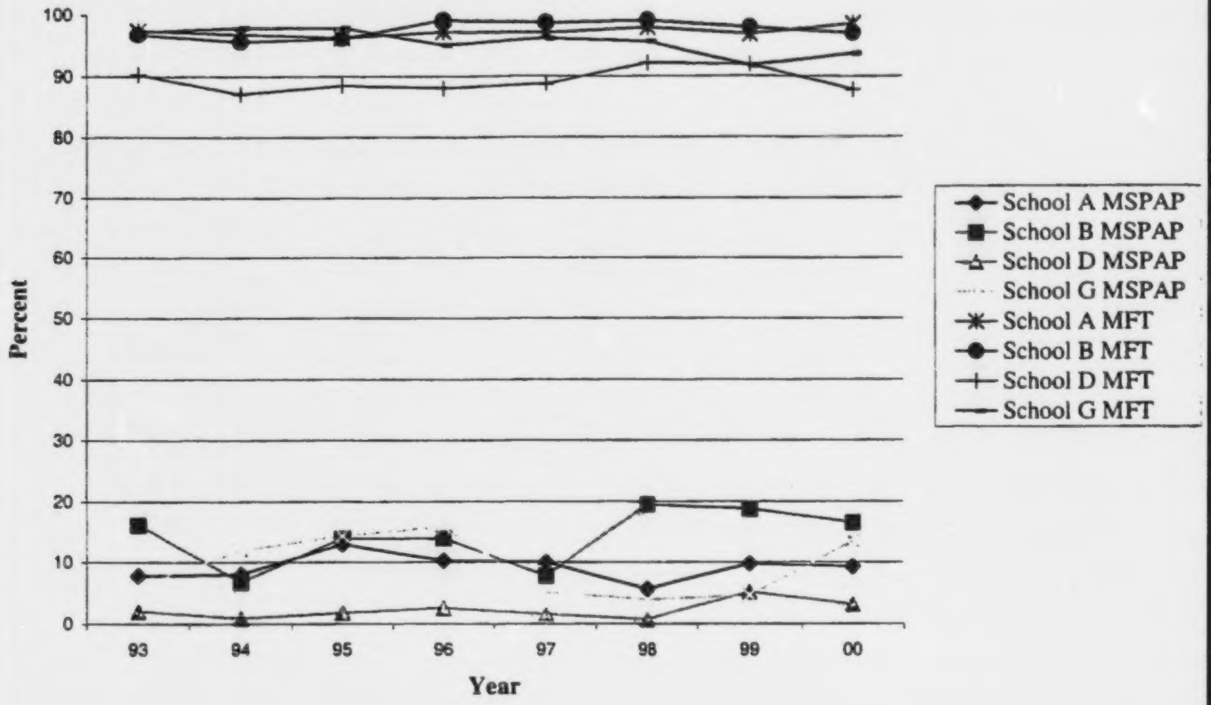
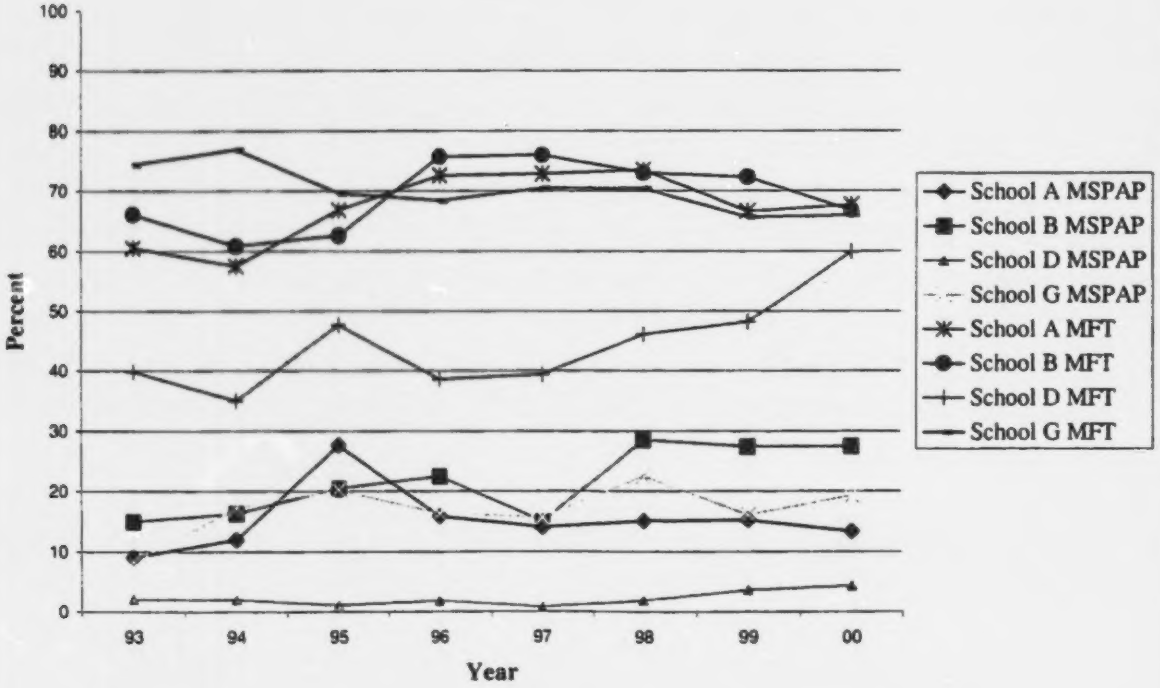


Figure IV.4 - Eighth Grade Math MSPAP vs. MFT 1993-2000



Organizational Instability

With combined annual entrant and withdrawal rates ranging from between 30 and 60 percent, student mobility was found to be high in our sample schools. Teachers attributed this transience to high levels of student poverty. In schools with the highest mobility rates, teachers commented on the difficulties they faced adjusting to a constant stream of new students entering their classrooms throughout the year. Compounding the instability that this situation created was the fact that teachers had to also cope with students exposed to a variety of different learning environments throughout their educational careers. Thus, as a result of high student mobility rates, teachers lacked a concrete knowledge base upon which to build student skills.

High rates of teacher turnover, common in all of the schools in our sample, exacerbated teachers' inability to provide stable learning environments. On average, annual teacher turnover rates ranged from anywhere between a quarter to half of the staff. Among the sample schools, a consistent pattern was observed with relatively more experienced teachers being replaced by younger, inexperienced, and often provisionally certified teachers. For example in one elementary school, of the 14 new teachers hired for the 1998/99 school year, just two were certified to teach elementary school. In general, the majority of the teaching corps at our reconstitution-eligible sample possessed fewer than five years of experience (46 percent on the survey). An overwhelming 71 percent of the teachers answering to our survey had been at their school for five years or less (the comparable figure for the four Kentucky schools is 53 percent).

High teacher turnover is mirrored in teachers' low commitment to their schools as we saw in Part III. On the quantitative survey, about half of the respondents expressed either a disposition to leave or uncertainty about staying at their current school. For potential leavers, however, better career opportunities elsewhere, a general sense of malaise at their school, and pessimism about their school's improvement prospects were more important reasons to leave than the additional pressure of probation.

In the interviews, several teachers cited teacher turnover in MSPAP testing grades as particularly troublesome for their efforts to increase scores. For example, one middle school lost half of its eighth grade teaching staff the year it was declared reconstitution-eligible. With so many new and inexperienced staff members arriving at these schools each year, administrators were forced to continually introduce a new cohort of teachers to MSPAP techniques and objectives. As a result, these schools were prevented from developing a stable cadre of well-trained professionals capable of providing the type of instruction needed for their students to meet the state's rigorous performance standards.

Chronic administrative turnover was also found to be present in most of the Maryland schools. One middle school had been overseen by no less than eight administrators in the last 15 years. Since many reconstitution-eligible schools (including the seven selected schools) improved only marginally or not at all after identification, punitive transfers of principals are frequent. In four of the seven schools in our selection, the RE designation was accompanied with an immediate change of the principal. Two of the four new principals did not survive their first year after RE designation, one was transferred after his second year. One school had a new principal every year for the three years of data collection. In three schools, the long-term principals survived the RE designation, but they felt highly uncertain in their tenure. One of them subsequently lost her job and chose early retirement, leaving only two principals who survived RE designation in their assignments. One of those two retained his job against the explicit wish of the state department to remove him and one retired two years after his school's probation designation. (By comparison, across the four Kentucky schools, the situation was more stable. Three of the four schools were headed by principals with long tenure in their schools. One school, by contrast, had a new principal every year in the last six years, though this was not attributed to the school's performance status, but to district problems.)

According to data from the seven Maryland schools, teacher turnover throughout the period of our study changed the age composition of faculties. More inexperienced novice teachers entered probationary schools, late-career teachers with over fifteen years of work experience remained, but increasingly mid-career teachers with between five and fifteen years of experience have turned their backs on working in these schools. We did not study staffing patterns with additional objective measures. However, we saw that in the perception of teachers who were present at school when we conducted the survey (in many instances during the year after designation) staff turnover did not necessarily result in a deterioration of teacher quality. We saw that teachers were evenly divided on whether their school had been left by disproportionate numbers of highly qualified teachers and had become unattractive to those highly qualified. In teachers' eyes, a recruitment and retention problem *due to the probationary status* of their school was not universally visible.

However, when the turnover of adults in the school becomes rapid and the proportion of those that are in the prime of their career diminishes from year to year, the notion of a school on probation that assumes responsibility for past performance deficiencies and strives to improve over a period of several years becomes obsolete as there is little continuity on which the school improvement processes can be built. The high teacher turnover puts in doubt the rationale for group accountability and for an assessment system that charts progress by measuring year-to-year performance snapshots from the schools. Poverty, a high number of students at risk from traditionally underprivileged African American backgrounds, declining or stagnant test scores, and a rampant instability of social relationships due to high teacher and student turn-over -- these are the challenges that schools had to reckon with when formulating a response to probation.

2. Change in the Maryland Schools

Leadership and Social Interactions

For principals, probation was high stakes and an urgent crisis for their organizations. In interviews with principals, performance indicators of the accountability system were a consuming concern that guided chosen actions and strategies for the site. However, the principals' commitment and determination was tempered by three factors. First, not unlike many teachers, principals, as well, felt buffeted by the ups and downs of test scores, rather than in control of them. Even in schools that posted gains, principals were not sure which strategies, out of all the ones they tried, were actually the ones that caused success. Second, the principals were aware of the districts' inclination to move them swiftly when short-term test score gains were not forthcoming. Hence they calculated their chances of success with a tone of resignation. Third, districts customarily rotate principals for a variety of reasons regardless of the school's performance scores, making transfers less punitive and more of a fact of life for principals. Nevertheless, more than any other actor at the school site, it was the principal who felt the pressure of accountability and who in many instances reacted to probation with more determined leadership. While in theory, the accountability agency holds whole organizations accountable for performance and is geared to provide incentives for individual teachers to improve instruction, in actuality it reaches the principal as the sole responsible actor who is made to stand for the performance of the organization and vicariously experiences the imposition of sanctions that personally hurt. High-stakes school accountability in the Maryland system is in essence high-stakes principal accountability.

Because of the pattern of "other-directedness" with which ordinary classroom teachers responded to probation, the fate of internal school improvement processes rested on the shoulders of the school leadership. The school leadership was commonly faced with a number of key challenges. First, skillful personnel had to be recruited and retained, a major effort given high turnover rates and acute teacher shortages in the urban labor market. Second, a process of internal communication needed to be unfolded during which the faculty learned to assume collective responsibility for the organization's performance and during which conflicts around teacher performance standards, student performance goals, and possible solutions to the school's problems could be aired. Third, in many instances management of operations needed to be tightened. A central concern at the sample's seven schools was the handling of student attendance and discipline which required the school as a whole to formulate and uphold consensus on behavioral standards and obligated the administration to enforce and follow through with procedures in case of infractions. Fourth, instructional programs needed to be changed and teacher skills needed to be upgraded so that students could receive instruction that readied them for the performance-based achievement tests.

Principals coped with these challenges differently, but some commonalties are discernible. District and state mandates, availability of additional resources, the principals' role concept, and leadership skills shaped their response to probation. First and foremost, principals treated district and state mandates, external performance goals for the school, tests and other performance indicators as well as district-adopted programs and behavioral expectations as givens, not up for debate. In none of the seven schools did probation elicit a lively debate on the meaning, the fairness, or the appropriateness of the new status. Although principals, themselves, were in many instances not convinced of the wisdom of the accountability system, they either appealed to their faculties to accept reconstitution as a fact, or they presented their measures as indisputable external demands, invoking the authority of the state. Rather than buffering the school from external demands, they became the accountability agency's primary conduits. Where principals ignored those pressures, they did so at their own peril.

Principals described themselves in the interviews as managers in charge of the organization. In all likelihood, this role concept has a long tradition independent of the school's reconstitution status, but it seems that probation reinforced principals' roles as managers. School improvement had become high-stakes for principals, and enforcing strategies and behaviors became a foremost concern. According to staff comments about the few principals that survived the RE designation in their schools, accountability made their principals into more vigilant managers, overriding the traditional hands-off style with which administrators and staff traditionally accommodated each other.

We observed a number of phenomena across the sites that indicated a stress on enforcement. Faculty meetings were mainly used to inform, admonish, or demand faculty compliance with external expectations and adopted strategies. The faculty's role was to report on task completion. Observed committee meetings were often perfunctory without the presence of an administrator. Principals emphasized those behavior modification strategies that could easily be monitored, such as the daily lesson plan, a fixed surface structure of the lesson, seating arrangements, bulletin board displays, the placement of the district curriculum on the teacher's desk, etc., all of which could stage the teachers' compliance with school improvement efforts. In some schools, the administration was heavily involved in the preparation and execution of specific test practice schemes that often took place outside of the regular classroom routines.

Compiling and writing the school improvement plan was an activity that commanded a good deal of principals' attention. In most schools, planning was done within a small circle of activists and career teachers that had the requisite skills to put the plan together. In only one school was the plan the product of common deliberation that involved substantial parts of the faculty during the first year it was written. However, in this school, as well, the plan was compiled by instructional specialists in subsequent years. Planning will be analyzed in more detail in Part V.

Improvement Strategies

What kinds of strategies do schools choose under these conditions? Do the schools select strategies that make the spread of organizational learning likely or do they manage induced crisis by selecting those that lead to greater rigidity? In the former case, they select strategies that create opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn around pedagogy are especially called for, given the performance-based character of the state assessments that require instructional changes in traditional classrooms. We know from the literature on school reform and teacher learning that such changes require strategies that open classrooms to a critical external eye and embed instructional innovations in daily classroom practice. If schools lean more towards the rigidity end of the continuum, they narrow options, do what they know best with more intensity, reinforce traditional patterns of change, and become externally driven as they shore up external support by outwardly and visibly complying with external mandates and legitimate ideas. In a rigid organization, classroom doors open as a result of control mechanisms, mandates, and the empowerment of external supervisors.

Low in capacity and credibility, inundated with new programmatic and managerial mandates, and surveyed by monitors, all of the seven schools on probation faced a narrow menu from which they could choose their school improvement strategies. State and districts exerted influence on schools through mandating specific teaching behavior, providing additional resources in the form of funds and material, offering an array of professional development workshops, adopting new assessment instruments, and mandating new instructional programs and comprehensive school reform models. Thus, improvement strategies were strongly shaped by the assessment system, state and district mandates and inducements, and to a lesser degree by site specific conditions. In the following, we list the most common improvement strategies chosen by the seven Maryland schools:

- Both the district and the state provided resources for the hiring of new personnel with special functions at the school, such as instructional specialists, testing coordinators, school improvement resource teachers, master or mentor teachers, technology specialists, and additional vice principals or counselors. These positions were not necessarily paid for by earmarked reconstitution funds and were not necessarily restricted to RE schools, but for the school their advent often coincided with probation and were seen as vivid expressions of state and district support for the school. New funds flowed more generously in District B with many fewer RE schools ($150,000 and up) than in District A where, in the early years of probation, a school could take in up to about $100,000 of reconstitution funds, but where funding fluctuated from year-to-year until reconstitution moneys were eventually folded into the district's overall budget for schools with special needs. As result, in District A schools, new programs reportedly were often abandoned before they could really take off. Nonetheless, across both districts, new specialized personnel and new funds were a centerpiece of the schools' selected strategies wherever they were available.

- Districts mandated new curricula, most notably new curricular guides that prescribed the content of lessons in middle schools, and new comprehensive reading series, such as Open Court, Success For All, etc. that prescribed lesson content and delivery in elementary schools. The latter emphasized highly scripted phonics-based instruction and active student involvement. The former mandated the integration of performance-based activities into the regular curriculum. In some schools, these programs ran into problems due to untrained and overwhelmed teachers who could not manage the programs and students who could not manage to learn the content according to the programs' pacing. In one school, these new programs were used as the new curricular blueprint around which instructional specialists planned the day-to-day curriculum of the school.
- New technology was high on the agenda of school improvement activities. Often considerable sums of money were spent on new equipment, specialists, and training.

However, efforts in some schools visibly faltered due to personnel shortages and turnover of specialists.

- Test preparation activities were a common feature. In addition to the traditional test preparation packages for the basic skills tests, such as CTBS or MFT, schools administered quarterly benchmark tests that mimicked the performance-based tasks and format of the MSPAP. Like the MSPAP, these benchmark tests often took place outside regular classroom instruction, and their grading was part of the teachers' irregular duties, often paid for by staff development funds. During the years of data collection, department heads and instructional specialists complained that some of the district-mandated benchmarks did not connect to the regular curriculum and were not performance-based. Teachers were also required to post MSPAP vocabulary words "at eye level," and use writing prompts and other test-specific formats in their classrooms with certain frequency. In these test preparation endeavors, schools often trivialized the complex conceptual nature of performance-based pedagogy. Test preparation meant increasing the practice of writing, group work, and generic test attack skills.
- Lessons were to be planned and taught in a specific format. Teachers were required to provide written lesson plans for every lesson, to bookmark the page in the official curriculum to which the lesson referred, and to conduct lessons consisting of warm-up, modeling, practice, and conclusion. In some schools, table group seating arrangements were strongly encouraged. Supervision on the part of administrators, instructional specialists, and district and state monitors increased. Lesson observations or brief informal walk-throughs often accompanied with written or oral

comments were common, though the intensity of surveillance, or what teachers in the interviews call "being in the fish bowl," varied widely from school to school. In some schools, administrators or instructional specialists were regular fixtures in classrooms, while in others supervision was non-existent.

- Staff development activities were mostly offered in workshop format. The most frequent topics dealt with training in new specific instructional programs, performance-based pedagogy addressing both general principles and subject matter specifics, classroom management and cultural sensitivity, and technology. The lion's share of these workshops addressed the needs of the many novice teachers found at the study's sample schools.
- Committees and teams, requiring additional meeting times, were installed in all schools. Examples included school improvement teams, climate committees, special education committees, testing coordination committees, and the like. Mandatory participation in these committees, however, conflicted at times with contractual working hour agreements.
- Extensive school improvement plans were compiled that analyzed the schools' shortcomings and outlined organizational action plans.
- Mentoring programs, most often the responsibility of hired specialists such as master teachers, targeted the many uncredentialed teachers at the seven sites.
- Organizational changes involving experimentation with student groupings (multi-grade classrooms, ability groups) and master schedules were implemented. In some schools, ability grouping was reinforced; others changed in the opposite direction. Four of the seven schools identified groups of students performing in the mid-range

whose learning growth could gain the schools the greatest statistical advantage on the state assessments. District personnel reportedly condoned this practice. One of the studied schools fell under the jurisdiction of an area superintendent whose district solely consisted of hard-core low performing elementary schools in District A. In this special district, a new master plan foresaw firm instructional blocks for reading and math and mandated the instructional programs to be used during this time. In two of the three elementary schools, instruction in fifth grade became departmentalized.

- In synchrony with national school reform debates, districts began to mandate schools on probation to contract with a comprehensive school reform model. Schools were free to choose from a district-generated list, but real choice was often a mere fiction.
- Although all schools had problems with classroom management, discipline problems varied from school to school. Despite variations in concrete strategies, all schools shared a basic underlying assumption that strong control was needed to maintain order in schools. Therefore, in almost every school, elementary as well as middle, strict rules about movement within the school were in place. Hall monitors with walkie-talkies, hall passes for students, teacher escorts, and lunch supervision were found in almost every school. In-house suspension centers were a frequent strategy. This kept the number of referrals, an indicator of school climate, down and gave teachers a place to send their disruptive students without heavy administrative involvement. However, because these centers relied on external funding, they were shut as soon as funding ran out, as happened in two schools. Workshops on cooperative discipline were common and well received, particularly by novice teachers.

3. School Differences (Maryland)

While schools exhibited common patterns in their response to probation, some of the differences among them are striking. Some of these differences suggest why some schools might have been able to improve their performance while others remained stagnant or declined. Short summaries from the full case reports illuminate distinct patterns. Principal leadership, the skill and authority of instructional specialists at the site, available resources, district personnel policies, and technical assistance decisively shaped the divergent paths these schools took under probation. Table IV.1 located on the following page, displays a synopsis of the seven cases, followed by six vignettes in which we briefly highlight the main findings from the full case reports.

Table IV.1 - Organizational Responses to Probation in Seven Maryland Reconstitution-Eligible Schools (1998-2000)

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G
Educational Load	FRL[1]: 50% Special Ed.: 10% Mobility: 40-45%	FRL: 40% Special Ed: 5% Mobility: 30-35%	FRL: 65% Special Ed: 3% Mobility: 50%	FRL: 70% Special Ed: 25% Mobility: 50%	FRL: 90% Special Ed: 25% Mobility: 50-70%	FRL: 80% Special Ed: 25% Mobility: 40%	FRL:40-60% Special Ed: 15% Mobility: 40%
Performance History	Stagnation: small gains and small declines from year to year	Strong gains first year after being labeled RE; stagnation and slight decline thereafter	Initial small increases followed by strong gains	Pattern of general stagnation with slight upward trend	Initial test score increase after being labeled RE; gains unsustainable; subsequent school decline resulted in state takeover	Moderate gains first year after being labeled RE; stagnation thereafter	Initial moderate gain followed by decrease and then recent strong improvements
Resources	About $150,000 a year; two new staff positions	About $180,000 a year; three new staff positions	About $230,000 first year; less subsequent years	Folded into general budget	Folded into general budget	Folded into general budget	Folded into general budget: additional $85,000 a year to fund two new staff positions
Organizational Stability	About 50% annual teacher turnover	Approximately 25% annual teacher turnover	Approximately 33% annual teacher turnover	Approximately 50% teacher turnover; High administrative turnover	Approximately 50% annual teacher turnover	Low teacher mobility	Approximately 40% annual teacher turnover
Leadership	Top-down enforcement; suppression of dissent; public reprimand; personnel sanctions	Top-down enforcement laced with paternalism; delegation of instructional responsibilities to specialists	Managerial/ paternalistic; delegation of instructional responsibilities to specialists	**First principal**: Top-down enforcement **Second Principal**: Hands-off , delegation of responsibilities	Initial group mobilization; emphasis on professional development; lack of follow through	Top-down enforcement combined with "maternalistic" nurturing style	**First principal**: "invisible"; reliance on middle management to enforce district mandates **Second principal**: more responsive to teachers; use of top-down management

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[1] FRL: Percent participating in Free or Reduced Lunch Program

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G
Staff Reaction	Compliance, later resistance; exit	Compliance; little to no resistance	Compliance	**First principal**: Resistance turned to open hostility **Second principal**: Resistance turned to open hostility; fragmentation	Compliance	Compliance	**First principal**: initial support turned to resistance **Second principal**: compliance
Planning	Principal with small team, little faculty involvement	First year: high levels of teacher participation Subsequent years: principal's administrative team responsible for planning	Small group of administrators and instructional specialists; little faculty involvement	Little evidence of strategic planning	Principal with administrative team; little faculty involvement	Principal with assistance from key staff members; little faculty involvement	Wide initial participation; final plan written by principal and trusted staff
Strategies	Centrally organized; easily monitored: * Establishing order and discipline in the halls; * MSPAP practice days; * Benchmark administering and school-wide scoring; * Extensive staff development; * Mandated CSRM[2]	Centrally organized; easily monitored: * Standardization of classroom practices and lesson plans; * Use of generic test taking strategies * Administration of quarterly benchmarks; * Reading and mathematics computer labs; * Staff development; * Mandated CSRM	* Implementation of new district; reading program * Reduction of overcrowding; * Development of daily reading lesson plans aligned with MSPAP; * Staff development; *Departmentalized fifth grade; * Common planning time	Very few school improvement efforts implemented: * Focus on discipline through in-school detention center; * Development of school academies; * Efforts to promote parent involvement	Compliance with district mandates: * Implementation of district's math and reading curricula; * Extensive staff development in performance-based pedagogy, technology, and new programs	Compliance with district mandates: * Implementation of district's reading program; switch from Open Court to SFA within a year * Staff development in new programs	Compliance with district mandates combined with some "homegrown" responses: * Staff development; * Encouragement of professional development for teachers identified as weak; * MSPAP practice days; * Implementation of in-house detention center; * Elimination of cross graded classes; * Emphasis on writing across curricula

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[2] CSRM: Comprehensive School Reform Model

Vignettes from School Sites

In each of the six vignettes, we summarize how interactions and strategies evolved over the two- to three-year period during which we visited the schools repeatedly, observed meetings, conducted formal interviews, and engaged in informal conversations. Our descriptions stress particular features that make each school unique in its response to probation. School A was conspicuous in its pronounced hierarchical rigidity. In School B, the principal became a vigilant supervisor who empowered instructional specialists to enforce the teaching of test-taking strategies in all classrooms. In School C, a similar dynamic was appended with more thorough attention to the core curriculum. Schools D and E are the two schools in our sample that had been on probation for three years by the time we began the study. By the time we entered the schools, improvement efforts were flat in both schools. School E is one of the first RE-schools in the state of Maryland and, a year after our study ended, also one of the first ones to be taken over by the state and handed to a private vendor. Lastly, the comparison of two principals' tenure in School G reveals the instrumental role principals play in shaping the response to probation.

School A: Pathological Rigidity

When School A was designated as reconstitution-eligible during the 1997/98 school year, a new administration had just been brought in to reverse the decline in test scores the school had posted the previous year. In February, the state announced that the school would become "reconstitution-eligible." The principal was new and inexperienced. While still trying to get her bearings in the school, she dedicated herself to understanding the new status of the school and fulfilling all new requirements that came with that status, most notably the writing of the school improvement plan. However, as the school year came to a close, teacher morale was low, expectations for performance improvement had evaporated, and dissension had reached the administrative team. One of the vice principals voiced her helplessness and her disapproval of the principal's lack of skill as a disciplinarian. The school year ended with a "mass exodus" of slightly less than half the staff, most of them seasoned teachers, among them a large number of science teachers credentialed in their field, some highly involved teachers, and at least one plan writer. Test scores declined for this year.

In the following school year, the district installed a new principal in the school. The new principal had a track record of having previously achieved performance improvements in a similar school. She was allowed to assemble her own administrative team: two assistant principals, a master teacher, and a coordinator for school improvement activities whose position was funded out of the local reconstitution budget. She immediately set out to tackle the school's discipline problems. Her plan involved a strict hall pass, escort, and lunch supervision system. She made it plain that her plans were not up for discussion. The new discipline policies were set in motion, carried out by a compliant faculty, and enforced by a determined administration. In time, student discipline improved. The principal succeeded in imposing a sense of orderly conduct on the school that had previously been absent. But she accomplished this by determined top-down action and the vigilance of the new administrative team. Little involvement and participation of the old building faculty was sought. In time, this emphasis on vigorous enforcement and suppression of dissent extended to all other improvement activities. In staff meetings, teachers were "walked through" the principal's strategies.

At first, this forceful management style attracted a number of teachers, particularly among the young, to become active. Though the school was abuzz with improvement activities, curriculum reform was never tackled. Instead the school focused on activities that could be centrally directed, such as MSPAP practice days and the execution of quarterly school-wide benchmarks, and easily monitored, such as the writing of daily lesson plans. By November of Year II, there were clouds on the horizon. Teachers began to complain about "too many meetings," too little input into decision-making, and the heavy hand of an openly disrespectful administration. A number of teachers, some of them highly involved in the school improvement process, confided that they wished to exit immediately, if they only could. The principal's "tight ship," bolstered by the requirements of the new accountability system, seemed to have alienated a presumably small group of vocal and highly involved classroom teachers. Many of these alienated teachers transferred at the end of the school year. Test scores, however, rose slightly.

In Year III, the school continued in the pattern from Year II. Top-down enforcement of rules and expectations was the *modus operandi* of the administration. Many faculty members complained about being publicly reprimanded by their principal for failure to follow through with their duties. Although the faculty formed a council that was to air their concerns with the principal, the principal refused to meet with the council and communication remained ruptured. With the exception of a mandated comprehensive school reform project that depleted the school's professional development budget and that was slow to get off the ground, the school continued with centrally organized test practice and benchmark activities. As a symptom of the low morale in the school, teacher turnover increased tremendously during the school year, and faculty members became resistant. At the end of the school year, the situation climaxed with the faculty council in open rebellion and threatening a walk-out. The principal compensated for her loss of control with a slew of disciplinary actions against teachers, such as entries into teachers' personnel files. Year III ended with the transfer of large numbers of faculty members and the disillusionment of the principal's administrative team. Those whom the principal perceived as disloyal were given the advice to move on. Test scores declined this year.

School B: Paternalistic Control and Empowerment of Instructional Specialists

School B is a medium sized middle school. It is located in the vicinity of School A and shares a very similar demographic profile. However, with a student mobility rate of approximately 30 percent and just 40 percent of the school population qualifying for free or reduced lunches, the school's educational load is relatively light compared to that of other reconstitution-eligible schools. By the time we concluded our studies, School B's principal had been leading the school for close to two decades, an increasingly rare situation in a school district that experienced a principal turnover rate of over 40 percent during the period of our study. When the school was placed on probation, state officials demanded the principal's removal, but with the help of allies in the district administration he managed to retain his job. Though critical of the state's heavy hand, he decided to take on the challenge of raising the school's performance. After the first year on probation the school's test scores increased substantially. In the second year, scores stagnated and actually dipped in the third year. Interview partners at School B were at a loss to explain these fluctuations as they felt they had been consistent in their use of instructional strategies.

Like other RE schools in the county, School B received a substantial sum of money from the school district earmarked for school improvement activities. These funds were primarily used to hire instructional personnel, purchase equipment for two new computer labs, and implement a comprehensive school reform model, Co-Nect. Other efforts to improve school improvement largely centered on the principal's determination to tighten up procedures and to enforce certain strategies and behavior patterns. The principal's long tenure in relation to his largely young and inexperience staff served as an advantage as he sought to implement these changes. Drawing from a stock of authority that softened top-down managerialism with traditional caring paternalism, teachers generally regarded him as warm and responsive to their needs despite criticizing some of his newly implemented practices. This seemingly paradoxical behavior may be attributed to the fact that some teachers saw him more as a victim of the state, rather than an internal enforcer.

The faculty at School B generally liked their work place, though they described the students as challenging and principal's accountability measures as stressful. In comparison to other RE schools, teacher turnover was fairly low. The principal actively recruited "good people" to the school, among them an assistant principal who was an able disciplinarian. He groomed in-house talent and elevated several teachers into instructional leadership positions.

Two of these teachers were instrumental in developing School B's school improvement plans. Although the initial version was written with widespread teacher participation, subsequent versions were largely updated by these administrative team members. School improvement plan strategies were mainly driven by a detailed diagnostic of the school's MSPAP performance conducted by School B's instructional coordinator. Her careful study of the MSPAP made her recognize some recurrent themes and cognitive operations which she translated into a set of generic instructional strategies that were tailored to the test and applicable across the curriculum. She compiled these strategies in a handbook given to all teachers. Enforcement of the use of these strategies through classroom "drop-in" policies and weekly team meetings formed the core of the administration's renewed teacher accountability measures. Although a number of staff resented increased administrative oversight, they expressed satisfaction with many of these new instructional strategies.

Both the caliber of support received from the instructional specialist, her collegial and non-threatening demeanor, and the principal's full endorsement of his instructional specialists, backed up by regular short classroom visits and write-ups, opened classroom doors and made teachers' instruction subject to external intervention. It is noteworthy, however, that these interventions were restricted to those elements of instruction that could easily be monitored by the principal or covered by the specialists' areas of expertise in generic MSPAP strategies. These strategies were add-ons to the regular instructional programs, which remained largely untouched. The comprehensive school reform project that the school found itself compelled to select, a technology-based instructional program, caught on very haltingly. Neither were teachers sure of its benefit, nor did the school have the technological hardware for the project to operate.

School C: Work on Daily Curriculum

As with Schools A and B, School C is an elementary school located in a suburban area adjacent to a large urban center. Approximately 65 percent of the school's overwhelmingly African American population qualified for free or reduced lunch and 100 percent received Title I services at the time we conducted the study. The school was highly transient, distinguished by a student mobility rate exceeding 50 percent and high teacher turnover. The year preceding School C's placement on the RE list, 12 veteran teachers left the school and were replaced by mostly new and inexperienced teachers. The school was also characterized by extreme overcrowding with thirteen portable classrooms utilized to capture student overflow.

Here, as in School B, the school's long-term principal survived the RE designation. When School C was identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1998, the school's performance scores had hit the bottom for the entire county. The school's severe overcrowding and fractured staff relations only served to exacerbate School C's woes. Upon identification, the district changed the school's catchment area and hence solved the overcrowding problem. By the next school year, student enrollment had declined by 25 percent and the student-teacher ratio had improved considerably. Nonetheless, a good number of faculty members transferred out of the school yet again.

The state's announcement of School C's RE status did not come as a surprise to most teachers. In fact, the teachers and administrators welcomed RE status for the money and help but most abhorred the way it was communicated to them and to the public. However, School C's placement on probation did surprise the veteran principal, who only a few months before had received a recognition from the state for the improvements made by the school during the 1995/96 school year. As with the principal in School B, School C's principal became proactive in the face of RE's threat.

One of his first activities was teacher recruitment. Using his own networks in the community, he successfully recruited teachers with high professional standards from neighboring private schools into his school. The principal also set out to implement a series of school improvement strategies focusing on test score diagnostics and curriculum reform. Though tailored to the elementary grades, the school improvement strategies selected by School C were similar to those described for Schools A and B. For example, the principal delegated the role of instructional leader to his district-funded specialists and backed up their authority with classroom visits, write-ups, and paternalistic control. School C also found a reading specialist who was not only able to hold her own in the area of testing diagnostics, but who also went on to prepare daily teacher lesson plans aligned with both MSPAP and the county's reading curriculum.

In addition to these curricular changes, several other organizational changes were made at School C. A master schedule and departmentalization of fifth grade instruction were introduced. Common planning time for grade teachers was provided to help foster collegial interaction. Professional development was high on the school's agenda and teachers praised it as very useful.

As in School B, the combination of technical assistance and paternal enforcement opened classroom doors and, in the case of this school, instructional strategies penetrated deeply into the daily classroom routines of primary grade classrooms. Particularly, novice teachers became eager recipients of the reading specialist's help. In the upper grades, however, the influence of instructional specialists on the classroom was weaker. Some teachers expressed disillusionment about the new requirements that mandated closely following weekly lesson plans and prescribed curriculum, primarily because they did not afford teachers the time needed to adjust instruction to students' needs or motivate them for learning. Despite these critiques, the school was able to raise test scores substantially in two consecutive years. Notwithstanding the school's success, however, by the end of the

1999/2000 school year, teacher morale was low and a substantial exodus of faculty, including the reading specialist and principal, was expected.

While in some respects the paths taken by the three schools described so far are due to unique site factors, most notably the principals' tenure, authority, and personal leadership style and the savvy of instructional specialists, district conditions and policies played a role as well. Reconstitution-eligible schools are only a small percentage of all schools in this large district so that the district was able to concentrate funds and human resources on these schools. As a result, it enabled the division of labor between the principal as the overarching authority and the specialists as the instructional leaders. Furthermore the district operated an office of school improvement that was in close touch with the schools and provided technical assistance on the set of strategies and interventions that were enumerated in school improvement plans, but the office also issued clear directives, at times to the displeasure of schools. Lastly, district officials protected seasoned principals who were given a chance to learn.

School D: A School Adrift

Schools D, E, and G had to cope with a district context that is markedly different from the district in which A, B, and C are located. Schools D, E, and G are located in a district that has seen about half of its schools identified as reconstitution-eligible over a period of five years. Funding for RE schools has been uneven and decreased for each RE school as the ranks of schools on probation swelled until the district consolidated reconstitution funds into its general assistance for schools with special needs. School D is a distinctly inner-city middle school located near a blighted part of town. It was one of the first middle schools to be designated as reconstitution-eligible by the state. During its last five years of probation, School D's MSPAP scores hovered around the performance level that brought it to the attention of the state, though slight increases in scores were posted in some years. Throughout the probationary period, principals turned over fairly rapidly leaving little trace on the operation of the school. School D wrestled with basic issues of organizational disorder and mismanagement, lack of faculty continuity and cohesion, and lack of student discipline. Attempts at instituting school-wide discipline policies failed over the two years we studied School D. The school was divided and rudderless. The tenure of two principals ended with serious conflicts among faculty and between faculty and administration. After five years of very little change, probation was becoming a meaningless label.

School E: From Probation to Reconstitution

School E is an elementary school located in the heart of a historic African American business district in a large Maryland city. Its students are overwhelmingly African American and poor. A Title I school at the time of the study, 100 percent of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunches. Twenty-five percent were classified as special education students. In terms of mobility, the combined student entry and exit rate hovered around the 50 percent mark. This combination of extremely high poverty, special education, and transience made the teaching and learning environment at School E particularly challenging.

While at the time of the study reconstitution was becoming a routine phenomenon in the district, School E started out as one of the first elementary schools in the state that was "hit" with the RE label. As interview partners recount, the RE designation was a shock. Educators at School E felt publicly exposed as failures, stigmatized by colleagues from other schools in the district, and fearful for their future in the district. At the same time they felt unfairly singled out. Theirs was a school with a particularly challenging student population: the "special ed magnet" of the city as one respondent quipped, and they did not consider their performance as teachers to be below par with other schools.

In the years immediately following School E's placement on the state's probationary list, the school met with modest success in raising its MSPAP performance as test scores for third and fifth grade students increased across the board. However, soon thereafter, the school returned to single-digit satisfactory achievement. In explaining School E's test score decline, teachers and administrators, alike, pointed to extremely unstable teaching and learning conditions. In particular, they noted that a highly transient student population coupled with high levels of teacher turnover prevented the school from developing a stable instructional program dedicated to incremental improvement over a period of several years.

The principal's first reaction to the label of "reconstitution-eligibility" was defiance. In a defensive posture, she rallied both her staff and the community against the unfair state measure. But soon she began to explore reasons for the school's low test scores. The MSPAP was a fairly new test at the time. As a former full-time staff developer for the district, she studied the test and realized that the performance-based pedagogy underlying the test was virtually unknown at her site. Soon she began training her staff in this area. Staff development and training became the key school improvement intervention in her school. She eschewed the heavy hand of managerial control. In the first years after identification test scores rose moderately.

As increasingly more schools in the district fell under the RE designation in subsequent years, the district, as well, set up training opportunities in performance-based pedagogy and MSPAP test taking of which School E took advantage. School E's principal became somewhat of an expert who was called in to provide training for teachers from other newly identified RE schools. But her own school's progress stalled. In her view, funding for professional development dried up as the needs for training mounted due to increasingly high teacher turnover and the introduction of new curricula (e.g., new reading series). She was unable to fill some key teaching slots with "strong people." At the time the research team entered the school, awareness of, and concern for, reconstitution-eligibility was low, as a number of faculty members struggled with the new curriculum and school improvement activities were carried out in a perfunctory manner. The strategic focus was still on training and the digestion of the new externally mandated programs, but administrative follow-up was missing. From year to year, School E's test scores either declined or stagnated. At the end of the 1998/99 school year, the district decided to transfer the principal. Instead, she chose to take early retirement. With her left a group of senior teachers who had in many respects been the backbone of the school's improvement efforts. The school opened the 1999/2000 school year with a new and inexperienced principal and many new uncertified teachers. Halfway into the school year, the state decided to actually reconstitute the school and turn it over to a private vendor beginning with the following school year. For the remainder of the year, teacher morale sank to an all time low as resentment and anxiety rose. MSPAP scores declined sharply, in many areas to "zero percent satisfactory."

School G: What a Difference a Principal Can Make

When School G, an overcrowded and rundown middle school located at the edge of a large Maryland city, was placed on the state's probation list in January 1998, both its

Maryland Functional and MSPAP test scores exceeded the county average. However, in the year prior to the RE announcement, its MSPAP composite test score had dropped by six points. In comparison to other RE schools in the state, School G's predominantly African American student body was relatively less poverty-stricken with approximately 40 percent qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Nonetheless, teachers attributed the decline in academic performance to an increasingly poor student population. In addition, they also blamed lack of student discipline, a school leadership unresponsive to changing school demographics, and state educational policies for the school's placement on probation.

Although generally perceived by most teachers as an unfair measure, School G's RE status did trigger some school change. The new principal was determined to take the school off the probation list. Indeed, that spring much of her energy was spent on developing a new school improvement plan. However, while her attention was diverted to this endeavor, the school was left to deteriorate. Using a top-down managerial style, she created a middle layer of management and isolated herself from the teachers while simultaneously pushing district-mandated instructional strategies, MSPAP preparation activities, and professional development opportunities, which were derided by some faculty members as nothing more than "dog and pony shows." Though "invisible," the principal alienated the faculty by overwhelming them with reform mandates and paperwork. As a result, an openly adversarial atmosphere developed at School G, resulting in the rapid erosion of teachers' strong initial support for the principal. Although much was happening at the school, School G saw little change in its MSPAP scores during the 1997/98 school year. Many teachers decided to leave the school.

Matters did not improve during the 1998/99 school year. Student mobility rates increased and the student body became increasingly poor, with approximately 60 percent qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The spring of 1999 saw parents picketing in front of the school demanding a safe environment for students and complaining about the school's non-graded instruction. MSPAP test scores fell yet again. For the first time ever, the school scored below the district average. Again, several faculty members departed at the end of the school year and during the summer of 1999, the principal was replaced.

School G's new principal brought hope for the school. She was creative in juggling the school's meager finances, she listened to the teachers, and she acted quickly on their advice on many levels. New classrooms were built in a previously open space and a new portable classroom was added to provided space for an in-house suspension center and an additional classroom. A full-time policewoman and a part-time correctional officer joined the staff to help maintain order in the school. Non-graded instruction was replaced with grade-level teams. Planning time was organized for grade-level teachers and emphasis on parents' involvement was added. The school started the district's new math program and piloted a new science program. The principal introduced a reading program supported by a reading professional from the local university and two new reading teachers. In the fall, she observed teachers in their classrooms and, with help of the school department heads and district specialists, analyzed their work. She realized that with so many new, untrained teachers, professional development had to be her top priority. Thus, she encouraged and, in some cases, demanded teacher participation in professional training organized by the local school district, nearby universities, and other professional organizations. At the same time, she retained the test preparation activities instituted by the previous principal and, as testing time was approaching, she exerted more pressure on teachers to get ready for the MFT and MSPAP tests.

As the school year passed, the initial enthusiasm for the principal began to wane among the staff. According to some teachers, it was obvious that she adhered to a top-down managerial style and did not welcome dissent. In addition, they believed her emphasis on testing was too strong. Teachers' morale began to slide yet again and absenteeism increased. For various reasons, six teachers left the school during the school year. Nonetheless, despite the growing unrest, School G's MSPAP test scores rose considerably in the year 2000.

Moving and Stuck Schools

We further explore school site differences by comparing two groups of schools, one group identified as "moving" and the other as "stuck" (Rosenholtz, 1991). We classify schools as moving or stuck based on quantitative and qualitative criteria. A moving school (1) was able to substantially increase test scores after it was identified; and (2) gave the impression of being more concerned, energized, and active as a result of probation in our field observations. A stuck school (1) did not reverse decline or remained stagnant in their test scores; and (2) gave the impression of being more dispirited, unconcerned, and inactive. We classified Schools B and C as moving schools and Schools D and E as stuck schools. All four schools are located in the state of Maryland.

We examine differences described in the case reports and vignettes in light of quantitative measures of capacity, accountability, and work place interactions that we used in Part III to explain individual responses to probation. Our aim is not to causally explain a school's increased or decreased test scores, rather to shed additional light on the specific dynamics that unfolded in schools in the aftermath of probation. We selected these four schools because they seemed to make a good contrast in terms of their response to probation, a contrast that is due not only to internal factors, but also external ones. The two moving schools are located in the inner suburban belt of a large city while the two stuck schools are in inner-city locations. The two moving schools received relatively generous support from their district compared to the two stuck schools. Furthermore, we encountered the two moving schools in their first three years of probation, the two stuck schools in their third to fifth years.

From the review of pertinent literature in Part I and the variables and factors we investigated in Part III, we discerned three dynamics with which probation might mobilize educators. We characterized these dynamics, in short, as (1) external pressure, (2) meaningful accountability, and (3) capacity. Each dynamic highlights a distinct set of factors: (1) external pressure and direction, public stigma, fear, internal enforcement, and compliance; (2) standards and goals of the accountability system accepted as important, fair, valid, realistic, and attainable given the skills of the faculty; and (3) social interactions at the work place (i.e. collegiality, burden sharing, principal support) and internal capacity building. In Part III we saw that the accountability system had weak personal meaning for teachers in general and higher performing teachers in particular. Rather external pressure and direction, but also collegial support and principal enforcement and support, molded teachers' responses.

Here we examine how the two sets of schools differed in the perception of educators working there. The two moving schools might be moving because teachers in them experience more pressure compared to their colleagues in the stuck schools or because they identify with the accountability system more strongly or perhaps internal social capacity is more strongly developed. Qualitative case study data help us understand how these dynamics

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might interact with each other. Table IV.2 displays comparisons of means between moving and stuck schools with regard to engagement, effort, and commitment, perceptions of accountability, and individual and social capacity.

Table IV.2 - Comparison of Moving and Stuck Schools (Independent-Samples T-Test)

	Individual Teachers' Perception		
	Moving Schools *N* =44	**Stuck Schools** *N* = 58	*t* **value**
	Mean[a]		
Teaching experience (years: max. = 36 yrs)	10.3	9.0	.66
Tenure at current school (years: max. = 27 yrs)	4.8	4.1	.55
Commitment	-.39	-.05	-1.59
Engagement	.17	-.47	2.72**
Effort	.13	-.60	3.94***
Direction	.30	-.39	3.16**
Importance of test scores	.28	-.15	2.10*
Validity of assessment	-.33	.18	-2.35*
(Un)Fairness	-.05	-.26	.93
(Un)Realism	-.11	-.15	.19
Expectation of improvement	.17	-.25	2.01*
Wake up call	.42	-.01	2.07*
Anxious	.05	-.15	1.08
Shape up	.23	.36	-.66
Professionalism	.07	.15	-.36
Efficacy	.29	.07	1.19
Skills of self	.40	-.25	3.06**
Skills of colleagues	.05	-.71	3.75***
Collegiality	-.04	-.71	3.26**
Principal enforcement	.09	-.30	1.80
Principal support	.12	-.37	2.26*
(Non)Burden-sharing	.33	.50	-.88

a: Mean is standardized number except those for work experience.
***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$

Respondents from the two groups of schools did not differ significantly in mean teaching experience and mean duration of tenure at their schools. Likewise, teachers in the moving schools were on the average not more committed to staying than teachers in the stuck schools. If anything, they were even less committed on the average. But they perceived themselves and their colleagues as more skillful on the average, and overall they reported more engagement and substantially more effort. Thus, they saw themselves as more skilled and more highly performing compared to respondents from the stuck schools. For teachers in the moving schools, the goals of the high test scores and exiting probation were overall more important, and they felt much more directed by the system than respondents in the stuck schools. But the accountability system was not perceived as more valid, fair, or realistic. If anything, it was the opposite. That is, teachers in the moving schools tended to see the accountability system in a more negative light than their colleagues in the stuck schools, though only mean differences on the validity scale were statistically significant. Apparently, accountability had even less personal meaning among teachers in the two moving schools, compared to the two stuck ones, and job commitment may even be more precarious.

The moving schools had higher organizational capacity. They were experienced as more strongly collegial, but this did not necessarily mean that features of group accountability in the form of more burden sharing were more pronounced. Contrary to our interpretation of qualitative data from school visits, there was no strong difference in respondents' views of their principals as enforcers of rules and policies. The principals in the two moving schools were seen as more forceful on the average compared to the two stuck schools, but the differences were small and statistically insignificant. Differences were stronger in the area of principal support. Respondents from the moving schools saw their principals as more supportive. We saw in the case reports that not only did the principals in the two moving schools supervise classrooms more closely, they also saw to it that teachers were given instructional strategies to help increase test scores. Perhaps it is the latter more supportive side of principal's leadership that stuck out in teachers' mind in the two moving schools, though across all four schools enforcement ratings tended to be higher than support ratings for principals.

Thus, in light of Table IV.2, the moving schools seemed to be places where one did not tend to find more senior, experienced, and committed teachers or teachers for whom the accountability system was more meaningful. It seems more likely that teachers in the moving schools became more engaged and exerted more effort despite skepticism about the rightfulness of the accountability system. They were more externally directed and more motivated to raise test scores in order to overcome probation. The moving schools distinguished themselves from the stuck schools as more supportive environments both in terms of collegial and principal-teacher interactions, but genuine group accountability was not perceived as stronger than in the stuck schools; neither was the enforcement of policies by principals. On the average, respondents felt similarly anxious or pushed by probation, but an acceptance of the signal as a wake-up call was more widespread in the moving schools. In addition (see section IV.6), moving schools experienced the external capacity building and managerial mandates as more effective for their schools than teachers in stuck schools.

We began our exploration of school site differences with three distinct motivation patterns of probation that we abbreviated with external pressure, meaningful accountability, and internal capacity. Speaking with the sentiments of our respondents, moving schools moved, not because accountability had more meaning for teachers, but because teachers in these schools were more directed by the system, accepted probation as a challenge, and were able depend more on school capacity in the form of teacher skills, supportive social relationships, and district capacity building measures. Not surprisingly, they were also more optimistic about their schools' improvement chances.

Organizational Rigidity or Learning

The change dynamic that was set in motion by probation exhibits similar patterns across the seven Maryland sites. School improvement under conditions of probation was to a large degree a matter of determined principal management, additional resources for new specialist personnel and retraining efforts, and top-down enforcement of externally generated programs and strategies. Generally speaking, the base for internal, self-directed participation among regular classroom teachers was small. In the interviews, teachers expressed willingness to contribute to the school's success, though they rarely volunteered with concrete suggestions for their own classrooms. Probation did not trigger intense organization-wide learning, although teachers and groups of teachers gained new skills through participation in staff development workshops. Rather than staging crisis and opening channels of inquiry into solutions with broad faculty participation, administrators tended to mute the voices of outspoken critics who might question the undisputed reality and legitimacy of the accountability system, but whose ardor might also expose the school to honest self-evaluation. Accountability was accepted as a fact; the valuing of performance goals was not publicly deliberated in most schools. The principals stressed consensus and unity, and the teachers were willing to rally around their leader as long as they sensed tangible progress, particularly in the area of student discipline and order. Teachers resisted crude managerial control, but accepted increased control in those schools where it was laced with traditional paternalism and concrete assistance. Though generally small, the degree to which the school became involved in internal processes of deliberation, self-evaluation, and learning varied. In most instances, active learning was restricted to the principals and the administrative support staff to whom many new functions associated with accountability and probation were delegated. Teacher learning took place as skill (re)training primarily.

These are not circumstances under which group accountability could flourish (see Part III). High managerial control by the administration, low commitment among teachers, the instability of the faculty from year to year, and the low motivational power of the accountability system sapped the momentum for group accountability that probation may theoretically trigger. Improvement strategies chosen by the schools corresponded to the patterns of leadership. Schools relied on external programs, sweeping standardization, easily surveillable behavior, surface compliance, and test preparation schemes that tended to trivialize the conceptual complexity of performance-based pedagogy.

Though this pattern was present in some form across the seven schools, schools' responses to probation were not uniform. Some schools managed to improve their test scores more than others. External pressures to adopt certain strategies abounded for all seven schools. Internally, the schools' responses were shaped by the authority and leadership style of principals and their interaction with the administrative team. Essential members of the team were vice principals or others who held the key to enforcing student discipline standards and instructional specialists who had the required skills to interpret test data and translate these into instructional strategies.

We found in the seven schools that high principal turnover or principals who had a low impact on their organizations doomed a school's probationary period. Seasoned principals who maintained continuity in the school and were connected in the community had a better chance to succeed, but only if they were able to rely on a team that relieved them of some instructional leadership duties. The three principals who survived the RE designation initially may have contributed to the decline of the school, but they were also instrumental in lifting the schools to higher performance levels, as measured by the state assessments, once the schools were put on probation, though one of them was subsequently deemed ineffective and removed.

In the three elementary schools, of all the strategies chosen new prescriptive reading and math programs, usually accompanied with some training, most directly tackled the curricular core. In the middle schools, it was the implementation of district curricula. But in some schools, principals or instructional specialists paid attention to daily instruction in a more fine-grained way. In one school, teachers were closely guided in teaching the new reading program. In another school, they were given specific test-taking skills that were to be integrated into daily instruction. In yet another school, the principal targeted special weaknesses of teachers and tailored professional development and on-going assistance to identified individual teacher needs. In each case, classroom doors opened and traditional prerogatives of teachers' classroom autonomy were overcome through administrative power and the helpfulness of the offered support. Schools in which we found these kinds of more classroom-focused strategies, in concert with strong principal enforcement, tended to post subsequent improvements in their performance scores. In our comparison of moving and stuck schools, survey respondents confirm that moving schools in their eyes are higher-capacity schools. They are more unified and supportive, their faculty is perceived ass more skillful, and capacity building is seen as more effective.

We began our examination of schools' organizational responses to probation with a number of questions: Would schools improve under the imposition of probation? Would they take the path of organizational learning or would they rigidify as they attempted to solve induced crisis? Would group accountability provide momentum for collective action at the sites? We saw that for most of the seven schools, improvement as measured by the state's performance assessment system was very modest and flat, though probation had arrested further decline in all seven schools. Only one school consistently improved throughout the period of our study. These improvement gains frame our analysis. We searched for factors that could explain the small gains most schools were making, and at the same time we had to ask ourselves why the effects of probation were so modest and the schools were unable to improve much more.

To begin with, probation was not a strong personal threat for many ordinary classroom teachers, nor did it strongly stimulate individual teachers' performance motivation. Rather it was an irksome stigma. Commitment of many teachers to the organization was fairly weak, and organizational instability from year to year loomed large for most of the seven schools. Under these circumstances, group accountability was a weak force to compel teachers to action. For most administrators, on the other hand, probation was a personal performance challenge that put their careers at stake. Administrators reacted to this situation in two ways. Either they became invisible and detached from teachers; in this case the school could not improve. Rather fragmentation, dissension, and dissatisfaction among faculty intensified. Or they became enforcers; in this case the school rigidified its operations and hierarchy. In neither case did probation trigger much organizational learning. Teachers were unable to learn from their performance status, though they learned from the staff development organized for them. Performance goals were fixed; programs, curricula, and reform models were mandated; instructional specialists had their marching orders; and principals demanded and enforced compliant behavior and program implementation. Chosen strategies promulgating increased standardization and control fostered rigidity as well.

In the more successful cases, increased rigidity was associated with more effectiveness of the organization. Discipline tightened and improved; more attention was paid to the state assessments; classroom teachers were on guard. Career teachers and instructional specialists were roused into action and rallied around the principal. A curriculum was being followed. Increased participation in staff development workshops may have increased the competence of (especially novice) teachers. Some of the seven schools posted modest improvements in this way. But increased organizational rigidity exerted a price. Teachers were dissatisfied; some resented the pressure and standardization. Increased rigidity did not help their commitment to stay, though additional factors unrelated to probation also accounted for teachers' low commitment. In one extreme case, teachers rebelled and took the exit option in large numbers. On the other hand, if rigidity meant more order and was coupled with concrete support, many teachers endorsed it.

The pattern of rigidity shows its limitations when examined in its pathological form. Not only does it potentially poison the relationship between teachers and principal and decrease teacher commitment, it also undermines learning around curriculum and instruction, an area in which teachers have some autonomy, though increasingly less so in organizations with rigid instructional programs. Un-coerced participation around curriculum and instruction, however, is central in an accountability system that expects teachers not only to do more, i.e. teach with more intensity, but also to do it differently, i.e. teach with a new and conceptually more complex pedagogy. For the seven Maryland schools, our findings suggest that organizational rigidity with its narrowing of options, its strengthened hierarchy, and surge in focused energy may contribute to the modest improvement some of these schools accomplished on the performance-based test, but the lack of learning among faculty may be one factor that diminished further improvements in the direction of performance-based instruction.

4. The Kentucky Schools

Findings for the Kentucky schools are derived from case studies of four schools in four separate school districts. The case study of each school is based on a minimum of fifteen formal interviews, as well as multiple informal interviews, with teachers, principals, district, and state personnel. All formal interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the research team. At least two researchers visited each school several times during a two-year period. Additionally, the researchers observed a minimum of five lessons, followed by debriefing discussions regarding the content and success of the lesson. Teachers at the four schools were mailed a questionnaire survey to elicit responses on the effects of their accountability status and their opinions about their schools.

The Four Schools

The four schools were selected according to their location, school type, performance history in the state accountability system, and willingness to participate in the study. Two of the four are elementary schools (grades K-5), and the other two are middle schools (grades 6-8). None of the four schools are in the same district, and the schools represent four distinct geographic regions of the state. The two elementary schools are located in small towns that are the centers of populous counties. The two middle schools are located in Kentucky's two largest cities. Because of its distinctly urban population, one of the middle schools is best described as inner-city, while the other is suburban with a large population bussed from the city center.

Kentucky has a minority population of 11 percent; however, three of the four schools in the study have populations that are much more diverse. One elementary school is consistent with the state average of 10 percent minority enrollment. However, the other elementary school and both of the middle schools have minority populations of nearly 40 percent. In each case, the predominant minority is African American. Additionally, small numbers of students are Asian American or Latino. The schools also serve much greater numbers of students in poverty as indicated by the percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Statewide, 46 percent of students participate in the program. However, in one elementary school and the two middle schools, the number of students participating hovers around 80 percent, and in the other elementary, the number consistently approaches 90 percent. Although these schools are not representative of schools in Kentucky, the were selected because they were in decline, and because of the fact that their high minority populations and high poverty indicators made them comparable to the Maryland schools selected for study.

During visits to the various school sites, the research team found that the four schools did not conform to the stereotypes of neglected and impoverished schools. One middle school and both elementary schools were bright, clean and well maintained. Their halls were filled with displays of recent student work as well as motivational posters and slogans. The other middle school was housed in an aging building in need of structural repairs and additional lighting, but was nonetheless relatively clean, free of graffiti, and well decorated with student projects. These four schools were not overcrowded. Class sizes were well within district guidelines, and students were comfortably housed within the main building without need for additional portable classrooms.

KERA and the Schools' Performance Histories

The four schools represent a checkered past of performance in the state accountability system. In 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly passed HB 940, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). KERA outlined a comprehensive system of governance and accountability strategies intended to encourage all students to perform at high levels. It created accountability standards for all students, provided curriculum content guidelines, and mandated assessments that reflected these standards. KERA also provided a statewide system of professional development, required that schools be governed by a site-based council, and devoted considerable funding to the creation and maintenance of a technology network.

The first biennium for which schools were held accountable ended in 1994. Thus, at the time of the study, schools throughout Kentucky had results from three biennial measures of their success (1994, 1996, and 1998). In our sample of four schools, one elementary school and one middle school were rewards schools during the first two biennia, but in the third biennium fell into decline. The other elementary school began as a school in decline, followed by a reward biennium, but in the third biennium, it returned to an unsuccessful status. In the first biennium, the other middle school was improving, but in the subsequent two biennia was a school in decline. Thus, akin to the Maryland selection of schools, we collected data in both newly identified schools as well as schools that had been identified for a longer period of time.

Responses to Probation

Many Kentucky teachers perceived the goals of the state accountability system to be unfair and unrealistic, especially considering the conditions of poverty that existed in four schools under study. Teachers in all four schools reported that they were working hard and were optimistic that their students would improve their performances on the next round of testing. Despite their increased efforts, Kentucky teachers were likely to point to external factors to explain the causes of their schools' decline. This was especially apparent in the two middle schools whose teachers and administrators repeatedly highlighted external causes. Interestingly, the elementary school that had been in rewards during the first two biennia looked to internal causes, including their fading enthusiasm for innovation, for their decline in the third biennium (see Part III for further information).

Kentucky teachers reported placing little importance on their success on the state assessment. In each of the four schools, teachers identified multiple other indicators of success as being more important than performing well on the CATS test, including student success in class, parental or administrative praise, affection from students, and CTBS scores. In one of the schools, teachers ranked success on the CATS test below seven other measures of success. Perhaps teachers limited the value of the test because of their lack of success. In both middle schools, the Highly Skilled Educators (HSEs) commented that one of the greatest impediments to reform was that the teachers did not feel the test was fair and thus found other measures to serve as indicators of success. The HSEs agreed that the mindset that other assessments were more appropriate interfered with teachers' willingness to change.

Kentucky teachers cited instability due to the socioeconomic situation of their students as a possible factor in their decline. In their comments, they bemoaned the difficulty of teaching a constantly changing group of students. Student mobility was high, especially in the two middle schools. One of the middle schools reported that during the 1997-1998 school year 58 percent of the student population either enrolled in or withdrew from the school.

Despite high student mobility, faculties in the four schools were remarkably stable and the distribution of various levels of work experience was fairly normal. For example, in one middle school one-fourth of the teachers had between 1 to 10 years of experience, one-half 10 to15 years of experience, and the remaining one-fourth had 16 or more years of experience. One elementary school, close to a military base, lost some teachers to relocation, but one teacher described the staff as surprisingly "local." Additionally, teacher commitment in these Kentucky schools was notable. The majority of teachers indicated that they were committed to staying at their schools regardless of its accountability status. In three of the four Kentucky schools, the administration was also remarkably stable. In the two middle schools, each of the lead principals had been in his/her position for at least 10 years, and in one, the principal and assistant principals had more than 50 years of combined educational experience. An exception to this administrative stability was found in one of the elementary school, which had been led by no fewer than six principals in the previous six years. Teachers at this school reported that this inconsistent leadership inhibited their successful reform efforts.

Leadership and Collegiality

Although the Kentucky accountability system provides for the removal of teachers and principals from schools in decline and in crisis, the Kentucky principals and teachers seemed reluctant to accept the possibility that they could lose their jobs. "I do my job and I do it well. I was not fearful of what might happen to my job or to me" (Teacher interview 51499B). The

Kentucky principals recognized their role in leading their schools through the reform process, but they felt less threatened. One reason was the existence of site-based councils that, together with the principals, were charged with making school-level decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and personnel. KERA provided for the devolution of decision-making authority from districts to the school level. With the formation of representative school based decision-making (SBDM) teams, Kentucky schools became responsible for their own improvement on state accountability measures. SBDM reinforced group accountability. While the principal was charged with leading the school, responsibility for successful implementation of reform was distributed throughout the school which guarded against the managerialism of the principal. While the principals remained the instructional leaders of their schools, they were unable to unilaterally dictate the direction of change in the school. Because the responsibility for improvement rested within the school as a whole, Kentucky teachers were more actively involved in identifying ways for their school to improve, and the principal was able to relinquish some responsibility for the school's efforts to improve instruction.

In addition to SBDM councils, the presence of the HSE in the Kentucky schools further distributed leadership with regard to school improvement efforts, but their effect should not be overestimated. A significant element of the Kentucky accountability design, teachers in the study's four schools found the HSEs helpful, but not of central importance. While 22 percent of teachers in these schools reported having intense contact with their HSE and less than five percent claimed to have no contact whatsoever, only about a fifth of the survey respondents from the four Kentucky schools attributed to DE/HSEs a strong effect on their school's improvement. Our findings are in contrast to another study that found that that 80 percent of teachers served by HSEs rated the intervention of the HSE as either highly effective or effective. In this study, respondents attributed the effectiveness of the HSE program to the fact that HSEs were insiders to the Kentucky system, yet outsiders to the school being served (Davis,1997).

Overall, HSEs in these four schools were not central to school reform. In many cases, HSEs offered their services to teachers who volunteered to invite them into their classrooms. Although the system provided HSEs with authority to remove teachers who fail to perform, the HSEs treaded lightly to avoid overriding the leadership of the principal. Thus, the HSEs were an added resource. Teachers described their effect akin that of other external consultants.

Improvement Strategies

Throughout these four schools, the most common responses to being labeled "in decline" were the alignment of curricula with the state test, the practicing of test-specific skills, and the adoption and implementation of a large number of new instructional programs:

- Attached to the accountability system is a mandated state curriculum. The Kentucky Core Content outlines grade specific skills and concepts and these standards are widely published and are the focus of the state assessment. The importance of the Core Content is reflected in school improvement plans that highlight aligning school curriculum with the mandated Core Content. The Core Content for Assessment specify grade level, subject specific skills, and knowledge that students throughout the state should have. Thus, when schools aligned their curriculum, schools and teachers worked to ensure that each of the guidelines were met within their yearly instructional program. The inclusion of state Core Content was evident in the majority of classrooms we visited. In every classroom but one, the state guidelines for the Core Content were posted, and teachers discussed their concern for "hitting" the right content for the test.

- The state also releases practice questions, test formats, and commonly included terms. In the four schools under study, these items were familiar to teachers and students alike. All four schools utilized information gleaned from these documents to prepare their students for the test. For example, it was common for schools to make sure that students had practiced a certain number of open-response questions and writing prompts.
- The improvement of technology and its inclusion into regular instruction was also an important feature in the schools' improvement strategies. These efforts were in line with KERA, which expressed the state's commitment to equipping schools with technology. Schools and districts received designated funding to provide schools with updated computers and network access.
- When asked how their school responded to probation ("in decline"), principals and teachers in all four schools pointed to many new programs. Often supported by Title I funds (for which the four schools qualified due to high poverty levels), comprehensive school reform demonstration funds, or other external funding, the schools attracted new programs for the entire spectrum of their operation. Such programs addressed issues ranging from discipline, reading, and technology to counseling, the provision of specialized services for students with special needs, and whole school change models. In addition, teachers were encouraged to take advantage of the numerous professional development opportunities offered by school districts and third parties. Thus, probation intensified the search for new programs and participation in professional development activities.

- The schools received orientation regarding the state core curriculum and KIRIS/CATS release tasks and assistance from their assigned DE/HSE, who was specifically trained in providing know-how with respect to assessment-specific instructional features. Beyond that, the state and school districts left schools wide discretion in formulating their improvement strategies. Thus, external interventions were neither mandated nor prescriptive. Instead, they necessitated that the schools devise their own response to probation.

Vignettes from School Sites

Garnet Elementary School: Fallen from Grace

Garnet Elementary School is located in a populous county in Western Kentucky. Garnet is one of the district's eleven elementary schools. Garnet Elementary has no rural students because its entire attendance zone is located within the city. During the 1999-2000 school year, Garnet enrolled nearly 580 students. Approximately 46 percent of the enrollment were minority students (primarily African American) and 82 percent participated in the free and reduced lunch program. Due to its proximity to a nearby military base, student and staff turnover at Garnet was elevated. However, the majority of the staff and students were "local," and most teachers reported that they had no interest in relocating to another school.

During visits to Garnet, the research team found the building to be clean and adorned with numerous hall decorations, displays of student work, and bright pastel walls. Throughout the school, clutter predominated, storage seemed non-existent, and school materials appeared to be well used. Teachers and the principal described Garnet as a school of choice, with parents choosing to bring their children to the school. Approximately 20 percent of the student body chose to attend Garnet despite living outside of the attendance zone.

The state and its community recognized Garnet as a "good school." The school faculty boasted that during both of the first two biennia of KIRIS testing they were a school in rewards and were selected as a KIRIS Pacesetter School during the period from 1991 to 1996. Only a handful of schools received consecutive rewards during the first two biennia. However, in the subsequent biennium, Garnet Elementary was labeled as a school in decline.

One of the lingering effects of being a "rewards" school for two biennia was the teachers' identity as innovators. The principal as well as teachers proclaimed to have been avid adopters of educational innovations in the early years of KERA. Many of the teachers at Garnet attributed their decline to an easing up on the innovations that they had adopted earlier. As a result of their waning reputation, they began to lose out in the competition for talented students who enrolled in other schools that appeared to be more successful, making their decline in the third biennium a troubling sign of their diminished market position.

The teachers' reaction to the low accountability status was primarily ambivalence. Teachers responded by saying that their scores were an anomaly, noting their belief that every school would eventually "plateau" in the Kentucky system. Additionally, they criticized the system by commenting that the tests compared apples to oranges, in that different student cohorts comprised each year's testing population. Some teachers admitted their role in the decline, confessing that they had lost some of their earlier enthusiasm and commitment for educational innovations. Teachers found the process of accountability to be necessary but insulting. Although Garnet had a high proportion of students on free and reduced lunch, teachers did not use poverty as a dominant explanation for student performance on recent assessments.

The principal reported having insecurities about being an instructional leader in KERA's climate, and he promoted the assistance of the HSE when the declining scores were first announced. The teachers agreed with the principal and welcomed the HSE into the school. The teachers found the help of the HSE to be more consistent with state assessment and instruction than what they or the principal had been able to produce on their own. But at the same time, the principal worked towards the adoption of a comprehensive school reform model, without being certain about the model's alignment with the state curriculum. Overall, the teachers and principal were remarkably optimistic about their potential to return to their days of prior success and to their reputation as innovators.

McGoodwin Elementary School: Revolving Door Leadership

McGoodwin Elementary School is located in southern Kentucky. The school is located in one of Kentucky's most populous counties. Within this county, 40 percent of the residents live within the incorporated city, while the remaining 60 percent live in rural areas. Although county governments organize most school districts in Kentucky, a municipality may choose to establish its own district, independent of the county. McGoodwin is a part of one of these independent districts. McGoodwin enrolls one-fourth of the district's elementary students, which during the 1999-2000 school year represented 460 students.

McGoodwin is located in one of the poorer areas of the city and is close proximity to an industrial sector. There are several abandoned storefronts nearby, and a small residential area of single-family, lower-income homes borders the school. Although McGoodwin serves students from several local housing projects, these are not within the immediate vicinity of the school.

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According to the guidelines for improvement established by the state accountability formula, McGoodwin had a checkered past. In the initial biennia, McGoodwin was labeled "in decline." During the following two years, the school was designated as a rewards school. However, in the third biennia, McGoodwin was labeled as unsuccessful.

One of the concerns expressed by teachers at McGoodwin was the turnover of principals. During the six years prior to the study, the school had six different principals. In interviews, teachers cited their inconsistent leadership as a major factor in the school's decline. They did not fault the individual administrators, but felt that the turnover rate kept them from maintaining consistent improvement. Aside from the effects of principal turnover, most teachers at McGoodwin believed that parent involvement was lacking. Teachers reported that parent activities were not well attended, particularly evening conferences. Teachers also commented that not all parents at McGoodwin had access to telephones on a regular basis, making it fairly difficult to communicate. They claimed that the parents of children at McGoodwin did not value education.

Overall, the response from teachers at McGoodwin regarding their accountability status was positive. Teachers reported feeling that they had benefited from the state assistance. For example, one teacher commented that "you hate to be classified as that, but I really think that we've learned a lot" (Teacher interview KYB14).

McGoodwin took several steps to improve their performance on the state assessment. They engaged a university specialist to assist them with reading strategies and employed a part-time consultant to help with the development of writing strategies. In addition, they placed an emphasis on discipline and hired a monitor to provide a roll model specifically for the boys at the school. Also, teachers at McGoodwin felt that they benefited from the presence of the HSE as well as the additional financial resources provided to them as a result of their "in decline" status. Teachers commented that the HSE "helped us to see where our weaknesses were, to focus on working on our weaknesses" (Teacher interview KYB07).

However, despite this additional assistance, teachers still noted that students lacked a readiness to do well in school. Many commented that the students were not as prepared to enter school as they should have been. "We've done everything possible to get them where they were and implemented every kind of program that we could possibly implement" (Teacher interview KYB14).

On a survey to which 20 of McGoodwin's teachers responded, most described their colleagues as hardworking and doing their job. Notably, when asked to rank indicators of success, McGoodwin's teachers ranked the state assessment as eighth, behind seven other indicators, including affection from students which ranked sixth. An overwhelming majority also agreed that instead of expecting great improvement for the school performance, they concentrated on individual student successes.

Oakdale Middle School: The Special Education Magnet

Oakdale Middle School is located within the second largest city and school district in the state. Found on the far outskirts of the county in which it is located, Oakdale is situated among the borders of a neighborhood, a major interstate and a local expressway, and agricultural pastures. At the time of our study, few students resided in the nicer homes surrounding the school. Instead, the school drew most of its population from the nearby run-down apartment complexes and through busing from the inner-city segments of the district.

The teaching faculty at Oakdale was both very experienced and well trained. Of the 77 certified teachers, 55 possessed a Masters degree or above, and the average number of years experience was 10.8 years. The administration was also experienced; together the principal and assistant principal had more than 50 years of experience in education.

In the first two biennial cycles of Kentucky's accountability system, Oakdale achieved reward status. It was one of the few middle schools in the state to be in rewards in two consecutive cycles. However, the third biennium brought decline to Oakdale. According to the 1998 KIRIS Performance Report, 99 percent of seventh grade students scored below the proficient level in reading, 97 percent scored below proficient in writing, and 73 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math.

Although teachers were notably positive about Oakdale and their teaching abilities, the status of being in-decline had negative effects on the morale of teachers and on the school climate. As one teacher explained, "I wouldn't say we've benefited from being in decline...There's obviously been a lot of negative publicity. There has been a lot of pressure" (Teacher interview 10699EC). Some teachers admitted feeling that the system was not fair to teachers in schools with populations similar to Oakdale. "They're holding a teacher accountable, and they never understand the type of students that you have, and that's not fair" (Teacher interview 51899S).

One of the most notable strategies taken by the teachers at Oakdale was the implementation of an additional reading instruction course for all students. Because literacy was one of the school's primary concerns for its students, Oakdale utilized their school-wide Title I teachers to offer each student a daily reading course in addition to their regular language arts classes. Also, Oakdale implemented a wide variety of programs targeted to special education students, students with inappropriate behaviors, and over-aged students.

In response to the accountability system as well as the district magnet school program, Oakdale teachers and administrators emphasized the increasing population of special education students in the school. In many cases, Oakdale faculty blamed district policies for the school's increasing special education population, which they believed was responsible for the school's decline in the most recent biennium. In the early 1990s, the district implemented magnet schools. Oakdale was not one of the district's magnet schools, and many teachers resented the magnet programs for attracting the brightest students and leaving the remaining students to be distributed among the non-magnet middle schools. As one teacher explained, "Within the past four or five years, you had the institution of magnet schools which drew your top kids off. You had changing of attendance, so we're getting a much higher population that are not reading at grade level" (Teacher interview 10699EC). Nearly every teacher at Oakdale who participated in the research study echoed this sentiment. The changing population was reflected in the numbers of student enrolled in special education. During the 1991-1992 school year, Oakdale had 8.8 percent of its students receiving special education services. However, by the 1998-1999 school year, this figure had risen to 17.6 percent and in 1999-2000 increased again to 17.9 percent. Other middle schools in the district reported special education populations of approximately 10 percent. The Oakdale faculty agreed that this large percentage of special education students interfered with their ability to improve on the KIRIS/CATS assessment. One teacher commented, "When you have the number of special education classes that we have here at this school, which is double to triple of any other school here in this county, I don't see that we have declined really...We're not a magnet school, and yet we are a magnet school for special education" (Teacher interview 51899S).

One sixth grade Oakdale teacher described her job as preparing students "who were second grade readers and second grade writers to be ready to go to the seventh grade" (Teacher interview 51799Y). Vast differences existed between the students' scores at the magnet and non-magnet schools. The principal expressed frustration with this stark difference in student population among middle schools in the district.

In addition to experiencing a large influx of special education students, Oakdale also faced a sharp increase in its number of students living in poverty. During the 1999-2000 school year, Oakdale enrolled seventy-five percent of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program. This represented a marked shift in student socioeconomic status from the beginning of the decade. For example, during the 1989-90 school year, only 24 percent of Oakdale students were eligible for subsidized lunch. This number jumped to 42 percent in 1990-91, and steadily increased over the next 10 years.

Aside from an increasing number of special education students and increasing numbers of students performing below grade level and participating in the free and reduced lunch program, one of Oakdale's greatest challenges was the high mobility rate of its students. During the 1997-1998 school year, more than 58 percent of the school population changed (i.e. either withdrew or enrolled).

Despite low test scores, and in the midst of the large number of students who failed to perform at grade level, the faculty at Oakdale reported that they were making progress with individual students. Many teachers commented that students were making academic progress, despite their inability to perform at grade level. Noted one teacher:

> The programs are in place and they were working and we were making progress, but when you get kids in the sixth grade who are reading on the first grade level and you bring them up to a third grade level by the end of the year,

> they've gone up two grade levels, but the state doesn't see that as an improvement. (Teacher interview 10599)

Oakdale's first HSE saw this sentiment as an impediment to making progress on the state assessment. She commented:

> I think that their mindset here is that they're making gains with these students, they're not making the gains the state wants, but they're making gains and they're doing the best they can...They think these students are so far below grade level that they will never be able to perform to the state's standards. To me, the first thing they've go to do is change their mindset. (HSE Interview 51899)

Stevens Middle School: The District Dumping Ground

Located in the state's most populous county, Stevens Middle School reflects the urban character of the district. The school district is the 26th largest in the United States, serving a total of 92,000 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district has 87 elementary schools, 23 middle schools and 20 high schools.

The racial composition of the students in the school is noticeably different from the racial composition of students throughout the state, especially the ratio of Caucasian to African American students. On the state level, 88.9 percent of all students are Caucasian/White, 10.0 percent African American, and 1.1 percent other racial/ethnic groups. However, of the nearly 900 students in grades six through eight enrolled at Stevens, just 53 percent are Caucasian/White and the remaining 47 percent are African American. Thus, in a predominately Caucasian state this urban center has a considerable number of students from other racial/ethnic heritages.

Stevens Middle School is located within five minutes drive from the city's international airport and is easily accessible to the expressway that encircles the city. The neighborhood surrounding the school represents an eclectic mix of urban development. There are pockets of old, run-down apartments and convenience stores, grand homes that have been restored, and well kept smaller homes. The homes immediately surrounding the school are primarily single family residences and are well maintained. However, very few of the students at Stevens reside in these homes. Instead, Stevens draws most of its population through busing from the inner city.

The original building that houses Stevens Middle School was built more than seventy five years ago. The yard surrounding the school is relatively clean. Yet the trees and shrubs surrounding the perimeter of the building are large and overgrown. The school interior also reflects historical architecture with two grand curved staircases joining the first and second floors and dark wood trim throughout the building. However, from its early grandeur, the school has fallen into a state of disrepair. The downstairs hallways are somewhat dark and there are many places throughout the school in need of attention. Most noticeably, one stairwell shows significant water damage and numerous areas require significant plaster repair and repainting. The paint on nearly all of the windows is chipped or absent, and many places on the ceilings give evidence of past water damage. Despite the state of disrepair throughout the school, the building is relatively clean. The hallways have numerous displays of student work and art pieces. With a considerable investment, the school could be restored into a beautiful historic landmark for the neighborhood and the school district.

In classrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria, the overwhelming majority of students were well behaved and acted in accordance with the expectations of teachers or supervisors. While classes were in session, the hallways were relatively empty, and aside from the classical music flowing from the PA system, they were generally quite. However, as students moved from one class to another, the noise at times became extreme. Overall, teachers reported feeling safe within the school.

In the early 1990s, the district implemented a magnet program allowing students to attend schools outside of their attendance zones as a means to satisfy student preferences and encourage racial integration. Stevens was one of a small number of schools in the district that was not restructured as magnet schools. Thus, it did not require application for attendance. Given the option of choosing a magnet school, most parents in the Stevens attendance area removed their children from Stevens in order to enroll them in a nearby traditional magnet middle school. This resulted in a population shift that eliminated many of Stevens' stronger students. In turn, those places were filled with students who had either not applied for placement in a magnet school or who had been denied placement. Many of the teachers commented that Stevens became the district dumping ground in that students who were not capable of attending a magnet school (due to ability or behavior), were forced to go to Stevens. Teachers believed that this left them with the bottom tier of students and that the district was causing their decline because they were continuously forced to relinquish their top students to area magnet schools.

As with Oakdale, this demographic transition was evident in the overrepresentation of special education students at Stevens. Among middle schools in the district, Stevens possessed the second largest percentage of special education students. Over the course of a four year period, the percentage of special education students rose steadily from 14.2 percent to 19.8 percent. The high number of special education students at Stevens contrasted sharply with the special education enrollments of other district middle schools. During the same timeframe, the average number of special education students at these middle schools rose slightly from 11.0 percent to 12.5 percent (Perry, 1999).

Aside from special education, Stevens faced numerous other challenges. For example, during the 1999-2000 school year, Stevens had an attendance rate of just 87 percent, which was considerably lower than the district-wide rate of 92.41 percent and the statewide rate of 94.03 percent. Also, during the 1998-1999 school year, 11.11 percent of Stevens' students were retained at grade level. Aside from this staggering level of failure, the school was also challenged by dire socioeconomic circumstances – eighty percent of students at Stevens participated in the free and reduced lunch program.

Although a rewards school during the first biennium, Stevens fell far short of its state index for improvement in 1996 and in 1998. Despite their circumstances, the principal and the teachers reported doing as much as possible to educate their students and improve their test scores. Many teachers commented that the school district tried to incorporate too many programs into the curriculum and instruction at Stevens. In their opinion, this strategy served to diffuse rather than enhance the programs' effectiveness. In response, the faculty eliminated many of the district's programs in favor of a narrow focus on literacy. They believed that this concentrated effort throughout the building would raise their test scores.

Many of the teachers commented that they believed they were making a difference with the students at Stevens. However, because so many students entered the sixth grade at a second or third grade reading level, they felt that the movement of the student to the fifth grade level in one year went unrecognized as an accomplishment due to the fact that the student still was not on grade level as he/she progressed to seventh grade. This frustration seemed evident in many of the teachers.

Kentucky Case Summary

In summary, the probation label was rejected as unfair and invalid by many in the four Kentucky schools. Teachers and administrators stressed continuity of the schools' efforts to improve regardless of the schools' status. Probation did not elicit a quest for turnaround. But public stigma hurt and instilled in most teachers a desire to shed the "in decline" label. Mild pressures to find new and more programs, do a better job at curriculum alignment, and conduct more test practice was palpable in the four schools. These pressures were absorbed by principal and teachers together. The four schools were fairly stable faculties, and in three of the four schools relationships between faculty and principals were established and rather collegial. The DE/HSEs provided assistance in assessment-specific features and were seen as helpful, but their role was not central the schools' improvement strategies.

5. Differences Between Maryland and Kentucky Schools

The previous descriptions of the seven Maryland and four Kentucky schools illuminated some important differences between the two groups of schools. In this section, we examine these differences with the help of quantitative measures drawn from survey items and scales. Table IV.3 shows that overall respondents from the four Kentucky schools felt less affected by probation and accountability and work in higher-capacity schools than respondents from the seven Maryland schools. The Kentucky respondents attached less importance to higher test scores and less meaning to the accountability system. For them, probation was less a call to wake up or shape up, and they reported to a lesser degree to having exerted effort as a result of probation. Principals did not appear as rule enforcers to the same degree as in the seven Maryland schools. Thus, overall probation seemed to be of lesser concern in the four Kentucky schools compared to the seven Maryland schools.

Although Kentucky respondents were less optimistic about their school's prospects of improvement and less certain about their efficacy with their students despite higher levels of work experience, they gave their schools higher marks on capacity. Compared to respondents from the seven Maryland schools, faculties were seen as more skillful and collegial and principals as more supportive, though group accountability as indicated by sharing the burden of organizational performance was less pronounced in the four Kentucky schools. The latter makes sense if the concern for accountability was generally lower in these schools. In contrast to strong internal organizational capacity, external capacity building and managerial features linked to probation, examined in the next section, were perceived as far less effective compared to the Maryland cases. In light of these data, it makes sense that probation was met with less excitement and a stress on continuity in the four Kentucky schools, as compared to the Maryland schools where in some instances probation translated into a more vigorous, albeit rigid response.

Table IV.3 - Maryland and Kentucky Schools Comparison (Independent Sample T-Test)

	Individual Teachers' Perception		
	Maryland *N* =186	Kentucky *N* = 101	*t* value
	Mean[a]		
Teaching experience (years: max. = 36 yrs)	11.3	14.6	-2.58*
Tenure at current school (years: max. = 27 yrs)	5.1	8.0	-3.48**
Commitment	-.06	.11	-1.35
Engagement	-.03	.05	-.51
Effort	.26	-.47	6.10***
Direction	.07	-.11	1.43
Importance of test scores	.21	-.39	5.09***
Validity of assessment	.11	-.17	2.43*
(Un)Fairness	-.16	.27	-3.39**
(Un)Realism	-.24	.44	-5.52***
Expectation of improvement	.11	-.21	2.50*
Wake up call	.15	-.26	3.27**
Anxious	-.08	.16	-1.91
Shape up	.18	-.34	4.14***
Professionalism	.12	-.21	2.76**
Efficacy	.26	-.48	6.12***
Skills of self	.09	-.15	1.97
Skills of colleagues	-.14	.26	-3.38**
Collegiality	-.20	.39	-5.06***
Principal enforcement	.10	-.16	1.98*
Principal support	-.11	.22	-2.56*
(Non)Burden-sharing	.12	-.23	2.74**

a: Mean is standardized number except those for work experience.

***$p<0.001$, **$p<0.01$, *$p<0.05$

6. The Management of Probation

High-stakes accountability systems are rarely pure incentive designs. Both the Maryland and Kentucky systems attach process controls and/or compensatory funding to the pressure of probation. For example in Maryland, state or local governments grant a limited amount of additional funding and mandate schools on probation to submit a school improvement plan. At the same time, the state refrains from extensive assistance features akin to the original Kentucky "Distinguished Educator" program installed by that state for its "schools in decline." State monitors are part of the Maryland policy design, but their role is restricted to being the "eyes and ears" of the State Department of Education. They heighten a sense of scrutiny for identified schools. Capacity building measures are left to districts. As was mentioned above, districts have mandated schools to participate in specified professional development, to follow an approved curriculum, to implement new instructional programs, and to accept oversight by state or local monitors. The Kentucky system combines the threat of sanctions with interventions by the state, most notably the Distinguished Educator/Highly Skilled Educator program.

We inquired with the help of the questionnaire how educators at the eleven schools rated what kind of effect capacity building measures, management features, and activities by external agencies had on the improvement of their school. Respondents could rate these interventions according to strong effect, weak effect, no effect or not present. Table IV.4 displays the percentages of "strong effect" ratings for the interventions by state and for Maryland by district and moving/stuck school.

Ratings for various interventions in various contexts differed widely. There were some interesting contrasts between Kentucky and Maryland respondents. Overall, teachers from Maryland gave "strong effect" ratings in higher proportions than Kentucky teachers. The latter were generally more skeptical. Except for new programs, none of the interventions were seen as highly effective by more than a quarter of the respondents from Kentucky. As for relative weights among the items within each state, Maryland respondents rated tightened administrative procedures, the school improvement plan, and the four capacity building features (i.e. programs, funds, personnel, and professional development) fairly equally and as more effective than activities by external agents. For the Kentucky respondents, new programs stuck out as effective whereas district activities were perceived as especially weak, but also principals' administrative procedures. We saw in the case reports that educators in three of the four Kentucky schools blamed their districts for a good part of their problems, and that schools responded to probation with the installation of new programs. Survey responses confirmed the qualitative case study data.

Table IV.4 – Perceived Effects of Probation Interventions on School Improvement

	Percent who say "Strong Effect"					
	Maryland					**Kentucky**
	Moving Schools	**Stuck Schools**	**District A**	**District B**	**Total**	**Total**
Capacity Building						
New programs	36	32	38	32	36	35
New funds	50	25	32	38	35	18
New personnel	53	24	28	43	35	14
Professional development	39	15	33	38	35	24
Management						
School improvement team	29	26	34	31	33	14
School improvement plan	37	30	38	39	39	20
Committee meetings	30	20	24	33	28	22
Tightened administrative procedures	39	24	31	49	39	10
External Agencies						
Attention from district	40	25	31	33	32	7
External visitors	30	17	24	33	28	12
District support staff	19	18	27	16	21	8
State monitor/ Highly skilled educator	31	25	33	25	29	21

Within Maryland, differences between moving and stuck schools as well as between District A (roughly 50 percent of its schools on probation; limited external support) and District B (less than 10 percent of its schools on probation; more generous external support) highlight the paramount role of resources and capacity building for school improvement. Effect ratings for interventions from respondents in moving schools and from District B were much higher than the ratings from stuck schools and District A respondents. In the moving schools, new funds, new personnel in combination with tightened administrative procedures and the school improvement plan stood out as especially effective in teachers' eyes. This confirms qualitative case study data which pointed to a confluence of factors, such as determined principal leadership, internal managerialism and rigidity, and the activities and skills of instructional and other specialists, that launched school improvement in these schools. In the view of teachers in the moving schools, new funds and new specialized personnel were key.

Similarly for the district comparisons, new resources and capacity building on the part of the district combined with internal management features received higher ratings in District B compared to District A. New personnel and tightening management procedures were given the highest credit for school improvement among the various interventions. Teachers from the four District A schools gave their highest ratings to new programs. As we pointed out earlier, in District A probation coincided with a number of programs, especially reading programs in elementary schools, that were made mandatory in all district schools.

Earlier we had hypothesized that one key difference between the two state systems is the way they envision delivery of external technical support services.

Kentucky schools on probation are assigned a state-appointed Distinguished Educator or Highly Skilled Educator while Maryland leaves these kinds of technical support functions to the local districts.

Table IV.5 – Level of Contact with District Coach

	Percent	
	Maryland ($N = 145$)	**Kentucky** ($N = 93$)
What district coach did….		
Intense contact	8	7
Talked	11	12
Visited my classroom	12	5
Conducted a workshop	3	3
Saw me in the hall	5	3
No contact	44	42
Do not know	17	28
Total	100	100

These differences are only somewhat reflected in our data (see Table IV.5). In the four Kentucky schools, district coaches and support staff were negligible features, both in terms of the frequency of contacts with teachers and in terms of perceived effects on the schools. In the Maryland schools, district support staff were slightly more present, but almost as negligible as in the Kentucky schools despite their greater role in the accountability design.

The data look different for state personnel, i.e. the Maryland state monitors and the Kentucky DE/HSE's (see Table IV.6). While only 32 percent of the Maryland teachers either talked with their state monitor or had intense contact with him or her, this number jumps to 77 percent for the Kentucky DE/HSE's. Clearly the DE's were a prominent feature in the four Kentucky schools on probation. Contact between teachers and state monitors in the Maryland schools seems to have been more sporadic and involved more visits without talking and workshops.

Table VI.6 – Level of Contact with State Monitor/Highly Skilled Educator

	Percent	
	Maryland (*N* = 145)	**Kentucky** (*N* = 96)
What state monitor HSE did.....		
Intense contact	11	21
Talked	21	56
Visited my classroom	23	4
Conducted a workshop	3	7
Saw me in the hall	13	7
No contact	25	2
Do not know	4	2
Total	100	100

Interestingly, much higher contact frequencies in the Kentucky case did not necessarily translate into higher effect ratings. As shown in Table IV.6, Maryland teachers' effect ratings for their state monitors were as high – perhaps better, as low – as Kentucky teachers' ratings for their DE/HSE. In either case, "strong effect" ratings did not surpass 30 percent, regardless of whether the role is constructed as the "eyes and ears of the state" or as a more internally lodged change agent. In the case studies, we saw that most teachers viewed their school's DE/HSE's as helpful, but rarely as centrally important for their daily practice. In the four schools, the DE/HSE's turned over fairly fast and had mainly an advisory role. While they offered suggestions and expertise on classroom practice, particularly with regard to the unique features of the state assessments (e.g., writing, portfolios), their role seemed to be more substantial in compiling the schools' improvement plans and in aligning curriculum. In the Maryland schools, the presence of the state monitor is more shrouded in mystery. The state monitors' effect is more likely due to teachers' perception of being scrutinized by "the state" and in the "fish bowl." Effect ratings for both roles were similar across Kentucky and Maryland respondents.

In summary, in the Maryland schools, capacity building measures, internal management features, and district attention were seen as relatively more effective. New funds and new personnel were especially forceful factors for school improvement in the two moving schools. In the four Kentucky schools, mainly programs, but also professional development, the school improvement plan, committee work, and the Highly Skilled Educator were seen as relatively more forceful. The data corroborate that the Maryland schools, particularly in District B, were moved more strongly by the provision of capacity building and internal tightening-up while the Kentucky pattern highlighted interventions that were more internally lodged. The role of the DE/HSE should not be overestimated. Although it is a key feature in the Kentucky probation design, teacher effect ratings for this role were surprisingly low in absolute terms, and in relative terms compared to the ratings for the much less present, but perhaps more fearsome, Maryland state monitors. In the four Kentucky schools, the DE/HSE became a specialist staff developer in specific skills, rather than the one who revamped the whole organization.

7. Organizational Responses to Probation – A Summary

In Part IV, we looked at the unfolding of social interactions and the development of strategies as organizational responses to probation in the eleven schools. The data show a core pattern across the eleven schools. What happened in schools as a result of probation was centrally shaped by the actions of administrators and available specialists and the programs that were adopted or proffered by these specialists, that is, changes in schools were fundamentally driven by districts, school administrators and specialists. This was so because majorities of ordinary classroom teachers at these schools were only mildly motivated by probation to become self-directed actors. For these teachers, as we saw in Part III, the signal of probation, i.e. the public status of the school, was a nuisance, not an extraordinary threat, and the goals and standards of the accountability system were of questionable personal value. The strategy portfolio selected by the schools under these circumstances leaned heavily towards the adoption of a plethora of new programs, the proliferation of new specialist positions, and the expansion of professional development activities. These were either financed by new grants or additional resources procured by schools due to their status, or were made available to schools by external actors. Thus, responses to probation were more resource-dependent than motivation-driven, contrary to the intent of the policy in either state. Schools' strategy portfolios reflected a great variety of needs, mandates, or funding opportunities. However, all schools covered novel instructional features specific to the performance-based test, such as writing skills, higher-order thinking, or cooperative learning.

But this common pattern played out differently in the two state accountability systems. We began Part IV questioning whether probation, understood as deliberately induced performance crisis, would prod the organization to rigidify or unfreeze to learn. For the Maryland schools, we detected a marked increase of administrative control in some schools and a vain attempt thereof in others. In the Maryland schools, most of the principals in the study perceived probation as enormous personal performance pressure.

Districts intervened strongly with new mandates for instructional programs, curricula, and managerial features. In one of the two districts, probation was coupled with an infusion of capacity-building measures and new resources. At the same time, social relationships and skill levels within the schools were highly unstable due to high teacher turn-over and student mobility. In the schools that "moved" as a result of probation, determined principals and specialists with varying degrees of skills worked on a compliant work force that nevertheless "packed up" in large numbers when they had enough. Apart from the presence of more experienced leaders and skillful specialists, teachers in the moving schools tended to attach even less meaning to the accountability system compared to the stuck schools. Although more teachers at these moving schools tended to be skeptical about accountability, they could bank on internal school capacity and district support: they felt more skillful as a faculty, more directed and supported by colleagues and principal, and more affected by capacity-building interventions. But at the same time, there was no organization-wide open dialog among staff or between staff and administration around performance deficits, goals and strategies in either the moving or the stuck schools. Dissension and conflict was suppressed and strategies mainly followed the logic of managerial initiative. Unstable and disorganized faculties rarely offered input that went beyond the retroactive "blessing" of administrative decisions. Across the seven Maryland schools, more organizational effectiveness was associated with more rigidity and standardization of operations.

The four Kentucky schools deviate from this pattern. Compared to the Maryland sample, probation overall seemed to matter less for Kentucky study participants: the accountability goals and standards held less personal meaning, the signal instilled less of a sense of pressure, and it was perceived as (slightly) less directive. Probation did not appear as existential: all four schools had experienced reward status or entering and exiting the decline status in previous years. The accountability system was fundamentally a state-directed program. Districts played a rather weak role in either mandating specific strategies and programs or providing resources and capacity-building targeted to the school on probation. By comparison to the seven Maryland schools, the four Kentucky schools were stable organizations. Here, faculties possessed more work experience and were more committed to staying at their school. Leadership in three of the four schools was stable and unaffected by the schools' probationary status. Principals did not feel threatened in their positions by their schools' status, and relationships between principals and senior staff were well established. As a result, the schools seemed to be more unified and collegial places, and teachers tended to perceive principal leadership more as support and encouragement, rather than enforcement. Case study data demonstrated that in none of the four Kentucky schools did principals react to probation with notably more control, so visible in the more proactive Maryland schools.

The most conspicuous strategic reaction of the four Kentucky schools to probation was a search for new programs, grants, and other supports that enhanced and augmented the schools' standard operation and an upgrading of instructional skills in key innovations demanded by the state assessments. Highly Skilled Educators assisted in developing the schools' plan and cautiously pushed the schools towards more focus on key strategic steps that better aligned the core curriculum of the school with the performance demands of the state. While in Maryland, the state provided the assessments and the districts made the decisions on mandated core programs that schools were to implement, schools in Kentucky had the task of locally aligning their own curriculum to the state core curriculum that is covered by the test. HSE's were the theoretical links between state and local school, but their activities were not central to improvement efforts in the four schools we studied. Their tenure at the schools seemed to be too short and their authority too fragile to be the overriding force among the surfeit of external consultants present at all four schools. On the other hand, Kentucky teachers actively participated in the search for ways to improve their school and were encouraged to do so by their leaders, and they exhibited rather specific knowledge about the requirements, classifications, and peculiarities of the state assessments.

We have now distinguished various organizational response patterns to probation. Among the Maryland schools, probation primarily triggered managerial initiatives on the part of anxious administrators and mobilized career teachers working on compliant teachers whose commitment to the organization was nevertheless shaky. In some schools this resulted in a strengthening of hierarchy, control, and ultimately effectiveness, in others in strife or fragmentation. All schools engaged in extensive professional development, implemented mandated programs, and ran test preparation schemes. But only in a few schools was the intervention fine-grained enough to reach daily instructional routines. None of the Maryland schools unfroze and engaged in a process of finding meaning in the probationary status, a process that might have involved a personalized analysis of performance shortcomings and an active search for solutions that were meaningful and appropriately adapted to classroom realities as perceived by teachers. According to teachers' responses and our observations, the fate of school improvement largely hinged on organizational capacities of the schools and resources for capacity building (most notably new instructional and other specialists) provided by districts.

Although the Kentucky responses in the four schools we studied were more site-based and not as rigid, be it in the direction of increased control or fragmentation, the schools continued in traditional school improvement patterns and refrained from a focus on teachers' core performances and an examination of daily instruction. Instead they engaged in amassing a "war chest" of external programs and consultancies that crowded out key tasks advocated by that state's Highly Skilled Educators. In Part V, we will investigate the schools' organizational strategies in more detail as we look at the topic of organizational planning. In Part VI, we will study the repercussions of the identified individual and organizational response patterns on instructional reform by studying teachers' actions in their classrooms.

PART V. PLANNING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

School improvement plans are a widespread feature in high-stakes accountability systems. They are a mandatory feature for schools put on probation for persistent low performance by their accountability agency. In many accountability systems, accountability agencies treat school improvement plans (SIP) as central to a school's path back to healthy performance. Often SIPs are extensive documents subject to official review and approval. Whether they are hastily thrown together or carefully crafted, these school improvement plans are vivid testimony to the way schools (and districts) think about the task of school improvement under unusual conditions of probation. As a medium for public scrutiny, SIPs are presumably of heightened concern for schools toiling under the stigma of "decline" or "reconstitution," public labels with which accountability agencies signify the schools' precarious condition. In studying schools on probation we selected a group of schools that, because of the threat of sanctions imposed on them, should experience a particularly strong incentive to take planning seriously.

As public and official documents, SIPs represent the "espoused" (Schein, 1991) views of teachers, site administrators, and district personnel on the task of improving their schools. Naturally, espoused views are not necessarily identical to educators' common-sense or more deeply held beliefs about how their school should be changed, nor are espoused designs necessarily implemented designs. The documents themselves will not unveil layers of lived culture and practice. Only case study data on the use of school improvement plans in the context of a given school can reach these layers. But as negotiated links between official expectations and practitioners' perception of school reality, these documents reflect the schools' attempt to systematize their improvement process. Ideally, SIPs facilitate an effective, internalized, and self-sustained process of school development.

Part V of this report explores what kinds of school improvement plans are produced by low-performing schools on probation and how they are used by educators at local sites. Moreover, comparing school improvement plans across accountability systems enables us to identify key policy design differences that may make a difference in the schools' responses. Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First we conduct a content analysis of improvement plans written by schools representing about half the probationary schools in the state of Maryland in 1998. Second, we present case study data from the seven Maryland schools on teachers' awareness and usage of the plans and the role of the plans in the day-to-day affairs of school improvement. Third, we compare the content patterns of the Maryland school improvement plans with those from Kentucky and from a third jurisdiction, the city of San Francisco, which differs in some important design features from either state.

Content analysis and case study data suggest that school improvement planning introduces a measure of programmatic focus and alignment into schools' strategies. But the plans have only limited utility in the internal development of schools under the threat of sanctions. Rather, they signal schools' conformance with externally induced obligations. Internally, and only in the successful cases, they serve as administrative levers to forge compliance among faculty. But accountability design differences make a difference in this pattern. Where specific bridging agents between external performance demands and internal performance reality are present, as in the case of Kentucky, plans show higher degrees of focus and internalization. Before we present our findings we will briefly review our interpretive typology which was already discussed in Part I.

We derived from our review of relevant literature three patterns of school change. They are a pattern of ineffectiveness, a pattern of external obligation and internal managerialism that may evolve as a result of a school's threat-rigidity reaction to probation, and a pattern of internalized organizational learning that may come about when schools unfreeze in search for solutions to their performance crisis. These three patterns serve as the basis for interpreting our findings.

School improvement plans produced with a *pattern of ineffectiveness* have been found to be unrealistically comprehensive and full of minutiae rather than being focused and strategic. Planning efforts document grand visions and routine tasks or become occasions for conversations about day-to-day routine operations. Internal participation in writing and implementing the plan is often limited.

Rational models of organizational improvement have gained impetus in recent systemic reform efforts. Systemic school accountability systems align system goals with school organizational goals and create coherence between incentives and instructional programs. The presumed press of accountability systems towards rationalizing school operations by means of external control may result in a pattern of top-down managerialism. A school responding to external performance obligations with a *managerial model of school improvement* may characteristically align its goals to the standards of the accountability system. Goals, therefore, are clear and focused on student achievement. The improvement plan uses the system's quantitative diagnostics (e.g., performance tests, required school surveys). Activities center on curriculum and instruction, and professional development is viewed as training in new skills primarily in those areas. Responsibilities for tasks are clearly assigned, but administrators and specialists on top of the organizational hierarchy carry a large burden. In the spirit of accountability, demands for new resources as well as attention to teachers' work satisfaction and motivation are de-emphasized. School improvement plans are relevant as public statements of the organization and as management tools for administration and specialist teachers to leverage teacher compliance with leaders' or administrators' strategies.

An alternative view of school change emphasizes collective, communitarian, or conflict-laden social processes that engross educators for whom accountability has personal meaning. School *improvement as an internalized process* under conditions of external accountability may be associated with a number of characteristics in school improvement plans. School goals reflect the standards of the accountability system, but these will be interpreted in light of student work. The plan addresses how the school will get from the present situation of probation to lofty external standards. Needs analysis combines diagnostics based on externally generated data with internal school knowledge. Analysis of causes for shortcomings focuses on those aspects of the situation that can be internally attributed and, therefore, influenced by educators at the school. The school's philosophy expresses the faculty's reflection on core beliefs and culture and speaks to the unique conditions of the site. Professional development consists of on-going activities that accompany a revamping of instruction and student-teacher relationships. The work of classroom teachers is directly evaluated, and work commitment is a central concern. Classroom teachers as much as the administration take responsibility for activities.

We presume that a successful accountability system does two things. It provides external standards and mandates of effective management which schools can accept as obligations. These obligations must be internalized. Once internalized, they make sense to practitioners and give occasion to goal formation, critical reflection, self-evaluation, focus and fresh commitment. It is the putative strength of accountability systems to move ineffective school organizations to a higher level of effectiveness. If standards, sanctions, and managerial mandates of the accountability system had no effect on schools, schools, more likely than not, would exhibit a *pattern of ineffectiveness*. But school improvement mandates, first and foremost, present themselves as external demands to which targeted schools may answer with a *pattern of external obligation* to managerial mandates and *internal managerialism*. Lastly, a *pattern of internalized change* may develop as schools translate external demands into internal goals and strategies. In our data analysis we will search for indications of these patterns. Though these patterns may not appear in pure form, strength of specific characteristics will allow us to make inferences on the kind of change process high-stakes accountability has been able to unleash in schools on probation.

1. Content Analysis of the Maryland School Improvement Plans

In Maryland, as in other jurisdictions, schools wrote the school improvement plans according to a template developed and required by the state. Local districts assisted individual schools in writing the plans according to the state template. On the average the plans were two hundred to three hundred pages thick. The state altered the format in 1998 resulting in plans that were below one hundred pages long. Most of the plans analyzed for our study were of the longer version, giving us insight into the way schools think about their improvement efforts long hand – though filtered through the state-mandated template.

The Maryland SIP template is geared towards inducing a model of school improvement that is standards-based and combines managerial and cultural aspects of the process. In the typical Maryland school improvement plan, schools are to start from an analysis of needs and causes that lead to under-performance, using the diagnostic tools of the accountability agency. Goal formation consists of a section on the school's philosophy divided into vision and mission and a section on goals and objectives. Needs analysis and goals are to result in suggested strategies for improvement that are enumerated in an action plan. The action plan also identifies individuals or groups at the school site that are held responsible for implementation. Ideally the plans should be internally consistent, i.e. needs, causes, goals, and activities should align and rationally follow from each other. Presumably then, the plans would deter patterns of inefficiency and facilitate effective management and internalized change that rests on affirming schools' core beliefs and culture.

Findings from the content analysis will follow the main sections of the plans: analysis of needs, causes of decline, goals, philosophy, and activities. We will emphasize data that speak to the *patterns of change* discussed above.

Analysis of Needs

Student achievement, attendance, and climate measures (student discipline) are almost exclusively mentioned as needs in schools' analyses. Not surprisingly, all 46 plans mention low student achievement, as measured by the state's performance assessment, and negative climate measures. About three quarters of the plans document improvement of attendance as a need. By comparison, needs that are not directly measured by the accountability system are featured less. For example, lack of parental involvement is mentioned by only 11 percent of the schools. Data used for the diagnosis of needs are mostly quantitative (70 percent of all entries for *use of data*) and derived from the performance indicators required by the state: MSPAP, Maryland Functional Tests, attendance rates, and to a lesser degree climate measures (collected through a standardized school climate instrument). By contrast, qualitative data from interviews, self study, or observations that might document the schools' own internal knowledge appear infrequently in the plans. Overall, the needs analysis of all 46 schools is aligned with the performance indicators of the accountability system.

Causes of Decline

About 70 percent of all causes of decline mentioned in the 46 plans can be attributed to external factors. Typical external attributions for problems include scarce resources, high student mobility, and low socioeconomic environment. Thirty percent of the causes mentioned are attributed to internal causes and thus directly controllable by the schools' efforts. Schools highlight as internal causes shortcomings of specific teacher groups, organizational-structural issues, limitations in teachers' skills and knowledge, and leadership weaknesses. Although the accountability system directs schools to look at their internal shortcomings by way of prescribed school performance indicators, when the schools are free to explain the shortcomings, they overwhelmingly point to factors over which they exert little or no control.

Goals

In most SIPs, the goals flow from the quantitative performance indicators set by the accountability system. Schools almost exclusively emphasize improved achievement scores on both the performance-based and basic skills tests (MSPAP and MFT), attendance rates, and school climate measures (e.g., office referrals, suspensions, measures on a standardized climate survey). These goals account for 91percent of all entries in this section. Numeric goals are gauged to the expectation of the accountability agency. In the case of the performance-based test, which is by far the most important measure of school performance in the state's weighted statistical assessment formula, this translates into schools reaching the proclaimed threshold of 70 percent of students passing at a "satisfactory" level within a pre-stipulated period of time. The following is an example of a typical goals statement written by a reconstitution-eligible middle school in 1998:

> **Long Range Goal #1:** By June 2000 – Middle School students will meet or exceed the standards for the Maryland Functional Tests in reading (95 %), Mathematics (80%), and Writing (90%).
>
> **Long Range Goal #2:** By June 2000 – 70 percent of Middle School students will meet or exceed the satisfactory level (proficiency level 3) in all content areas as measured by the MSPAP Maryland School Performance Assessment Program.
>
> **Long Range Goal #3:** By June 2000 – student attendance will meet or exceed the state satisfactory standard of 94%.[1]

The school proceeds to enumerate short-term objectives for these goals which break up the difference between actual low performance and external performance benchmarks into segments, each representing one year of expected growth towards the 70 percent mark. In actuality, the 1997 school's MSPP[2] Report Card indicated the following percentages of students at a "satisfactory" level or above: Reading – 1.6%, Mathematics – 0.8%, Social Studies – 6.1%, Science – 3.7%, Writing – 5.3%, and Language Usage – 7.7%.

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[1] A fourth long range goal for climate follows which is not displayed here.

The discrepancy between actual school performance and external performance benchmarks is stark across most of the 46 SIPs although it is especially pronounced in our example. According to our calculations on 33 reconstitution-eligible schools (1996 cohort), schools on probation in the state of Maryland increased the number of students scoring at the "satisfactory" level by an average of three to five percent over a two-year period. In order to reach the expected performance benchmark of 70 percent "satisfactory" in a reasonable time frame, many schools, including the above cited example, profess to increase that percentage by at least 15 percent every year – a challenge that would require extraordinary awareness and determination of faculty. We cannot judge from the SIP document alone whether such awareness and determination has in fact been generated by these goals, i.e. to what degree these ambitious goals have been internalized. We can, however, infer that internalization is shallow when schools calculate their performance goals according to a formula without addressing the gulf between projected high growth and past performance records. We found, in 90 percent of the 46 plans, a procedure for goal formation that is similar to the above cited example. We concluded therefore that in most schools goal formation happens in "conformity to system expectations" with "achievability doubtful."

Philosophy

Making inferences from statements of philosophy about a school's change process is difficult. What might be grandstanding and a collection of clichés in one case may represent the hard labor of internal reflection in another. But it could be useful to know whether schools use the philosophy section to profile a moral, cultural, or programmatic focus (e.g., technology magnet; Montessori approach) or whether an approach of "covering all bases" prevails. Our data indicate that a "covering all bases" approach prevails in the 46 coded plans. On the average, 4 tenets were coded per school. Twenty-eight of the 46 schools mention as a tenet (in one formulation or another) that "all students can learn." Twenty-four schools mention tenets circumscribed by the code "Preparation for the competitive society/technological age" and the code "Development of individual students to their fullest potential." Other statements prevalent in the philosophy domain are: "High expectations for our students" (20 schools); "Safe environment" (19 schools); "School as family/community" (17 schools); and "Contributing to democratic and diverse society" (15 schools). These tenets make up 85 percent of all coded tenets. The following exemplifies a typical philosophy section:

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[2] MSPP = Maryland School Performance Program.

Vision Statement

> We envision the ___ Elementary/Middle School as a learning community where all students succeed. There will be an exemplary instructional delivery system and a safe and orderly environment, with students, parents, community partners and staff working collaboratively to achieve the goals of ___ Elementary/Middle School.

Mission Statement

> The ___ Elementary/Middle School enthusiastically supports the mission of the ___ City Schools by creating a school environment that celebrates, challenges, and rewards each child's individuality. The mission of ___ Elementary/Middle School is to educate all of its students so that they are able to achieve at their maximum potential.

Philosophy

> The guiding belief statement of the ___ family is "Educational Excellence Encompasses Everyone." To that effect, we believe every child should experience...

...a strong and effective instructional program.
...cultural events that broaden his/her horizons.
...positive self-concepts and heightened self-esteem.
...a safe and orderly school environment.

Quantification of Activities

Activities were ordered according to seven domains: organization, governance, climate and attendance, parents and community, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and teacher performance. The analyzed plans attest to an extensive array of activities. Table V.1 displays the median number of activities schools planned for each activity domain.

Table V.1 – Median Number of Activities According to Activity Domains (Maryland)

Activity Domains	**Median** (per school)
Organization	4
Governance	3
Climate and attendance	7
Parents and community	5
Curriculum and instruction	11
Professional development	9
Teacher performance	4
Total entries	46

A set of close to 50 activities on the average amounts to a substantial reform load for a school. Curriculum and instruction (C&I) activities are a focus (77 percent of professional development activities are C&I related), but they represent slightly fewer than half of all activities (median 21 out of 46 activities). Schools also attend to many other areas of their operation. Governance (e.g., shared decision making), so prominent in earlier restructuring efforts, play a lesser role in the Maryland accountability-driven reform.

The Content of Action Plans

We rank ordered activities according to the frequency of their mentioning in the plans. Rank ordering was done separately for each activity domain. Table V.2 displays the rank ordering of activities by activity domains. Only activities up to the median number for each domain are listed here. Table V.2 shows that the content of intended activities are closely related to the most frequently mentioned needs which coincide with school performance indicators. Most intended organizational changes are add-ons, i.e. new specialized services (e.g., attendance monitor) or extensions of existing programs (e.g., extended instructional time). Governance activities are directly related to the task of managing and implementing the plan. Curriculum and instruction as well as professional development activities are centered on the new challenges of the performance-based test (e.g., test language, importance of writing, portfolios, student-centered instructional strategies), on district-adopted curricula, and new instructional program packages. It is to the credit of the Maryland assessment program that many of the C&I activities aim at upgrading the complexity of learning, rather than focusing on drill and practice alone. Teacher performance activities revolve around increased control (e.g., mandating lesson plans, tighter supervision), whereas commitment enhancement activities are relatively de-emphasized, comprising 17 percent of all teacher performance entries.

Table V.2 – Rank-Order of Activities in 46 Maryland Action Plans by Median Number of Activities for Each Activity Domain

Organization	Governance/ Coordination	Climate/ Attendance	Parent/ Community	Curriculum & Instruction	Professional Development	Teacher Performanc
New personnel	School Improvement Team	Tightening attendance procedures	Parent workshops	Packaged instructional program	Dimensions of Learning	Requiring use of specific curricula or materials
After-school extended program	Monitoring activities	Awards (assemblies)	Parent nights	Computer-assisted instruction	MSPAP/ Maryland Learning Outcomes	Requiring lesson plans
New specialized role/service	Task forces and committees	School-wide discipline plan	Parent/ community newsletter	Planning test-Specific activities	Performance-based instruction	Tightening principal supervision
New teams		Conflict resolution program	Regular home calls	Remediating specific curricular weaknesses	Cooperative learning strategies	Peer coaching
		Spirit days	Parent shared-decision-making	Portfolios	MARS (performance-based Math)	
		More parent-teacher conferences		Cooperative learning	STARS (performance-based Science)	
		Display of student work and Strengthening of counseling department (tie)		Interdisciplinary integrative Units or lessons	City Curriculum implementation	
				New test-specific performance-based lessons or units	Reading instruction	
				Developing list of test words	Cooperative discipline	
				Writing process	Writing Across the Curriculum	
				Projects		
				Writing prompts		

Responsibility

Responsibilities for implementation rest to a large degree on administrators and personnel in charge of special services (e.g., counseling office, reading specialist, resource teacher). Principal and administration are responsible for about one third of the total number of 2,113 activities that are listed by all 46 schools. Another third falls in the responsibility of special services while classroom teachers are only directly responsible for about one quarter of the activities. Overall, administration and special services, rather than classroom teachers, carry the burden of responsibility and are therefore focal activity centers in the improvement effort. The proportions shift somewhat in the curriculum and instruction domain. Again, administration and special services sign responsible for 57 percent of the 536 entered activities. But in this case, special services picks up 43 percent of responsibilities as against only 14 percent for the administration, while classroom teachers are responsible for 61 percent of the activities (total exceeds 100% because of multiple nominations per activity).

Professional Growth

Professional development is conceived in terms of discrete classes and workshops in which teachers are trained for specific skills, rather than in terms of on-going growth integrated with the routines of daily classroom instruction. The vast majority (87%) of listed professional development activities are classes and workshops. The majority of the professional development activities (351 activities among the 46 plans) are curriculum and instruction-oriented (77% of all professional development activities). Many topics are closely related to the new tests and curricula. About half the schools mention workshops on student discipline. It is noteworthy that space for on-going dialogue on progress made is not part of intended professional development activities according to most plans.

Evaluation

Of the 2,113 total number of activities, 45 percent were coded as "new" and 55 percent as "ongoing" (usually indicated by phrases such as "will continue" or "will begin" respectively, although the time frame was often difficult to clearly pinpoint). The 1,162 entries for ongoing activities contrast with only 83 activity entries in the data base for "progress made," a category raters were to record whenever they found incidence of a past activity or program clearly identified as having been beneficial or effective for the school. Given that a high percentage of activities carry over from one year to the next, one could have expected a more analytic or evaluative stance.

Internal Capacity and Scale of Action plan

We grouped the 46 reconstitution-eligible schools in our sample according to size. We hypothesized that if SIPs are truly the product of a school's internal capacity to implement the activities listed in the plan, then one might expect small schools to list fewer activities than large schools since small schools have fewer adults to carry out activities. The 10 largest schools in our sample have between 760 and 1,130 students; the 10 smallest ones have between 240 and 350 students. But the number of activities listed by both groups is 45 on the average, almost identical to the mean for the whole sample. Hence, size is not a decisive factor in the load of activities that schools pledge to carry out in the course of one school year.

Performance Improvement and Types of Activities

We further hypothesized that schools posting the largest performance gains on the MSPAP may emphasize different activities than schools with the largest declines. The 10 most improved schools in our sample post a gain of 0.06 to 17.5 points in their composite performance index (CI) from 1997 to 98. The 10 most declined schools post a loss of -0.7 to -8.8 points for the same period. Yet, the types of activities chosen by both groups are very similar and resemble the overall pattern of all 46 schools. This finding puts the utility of school improvement plans in doubt. When neither the number of activities planned, nor the specific kinds of activities listed appear decisive for schools' performance development, the quality of implementation, rather than the quality of the written plan seems key.

Interpretation of Content Patterns

A look across the analyzed sections of the plans reveals that schools use external performance indicators as a basis for their needs analysis and have adopted ambitious external goals as their performance objectives. A good proportion of intended activities are aligned to the ambitious performance indicators of the system, most notably the performance-based achievement test. Activities in the domain of curriculum and instruction are central and aim at upgrading teaching skills and learning environments. Thus, there is indication that schools have aligned their (intended) action with accountability demands.

On the other hand, the plans betray a notion of change that emphasizes standard programmatic solutions (e.g., packaged programs) and the extension of existing programs (i.e. more instruction, more personnel, more skills). The number of intended activities in many schools represents a substantial load, if not overload. They blanket performance "territory" rather than focus on central strategies for the year. The externalization of causes of decline, the lack of on-going evaluation of past activities, the absence of representations of internal teacher knowledge and expertise on these matters, the burden of responsibility carried by administration and special services, the neglect of teacher commitment activities, the notion of professional growth as skill and workshop-bound, and lastly, the sameness of plans regardless of internal personnel capacity and actual performance all corroborate a pattern of compliance, external obligation, and internal managerialism. Of the three initially discussed patterns, the pattern of *external obligation/ internal managerialism* is the best fit with the content of the plans while there is some evidence of traditional ineffectiveness and an absence of indicators of internalized change.

The effectiveness of the rational management model employed by school administrators and planners (most likely prodded by the stipulated planning template) rests on the degree to which classroom teachers own the ambitious goals spelled out in the plans and recognize the effectiveness of chosen activities based on their own daily experience in the classroom. But when, for example, goal statements are formulaic accommodations to external demands, they cannot inform action and on-going evaluation; when philosophies cover all bases, they cannot rally the effort for the year; when professional development is all skill and workshop-based, there will be no extra time to work through the contradictions, conflicts, and dilemmas that need to be addressed if groups are to act with common purpose.

The plans in the current format attest to the determination on the part of the accountability agency to accomplish school improvement by aligning system performance goals with school goals, by rationalizing management, and by making schools' change efforts measurable and subject to monitoring. The result is that school goals and objectives mimic system goals and that action plans privilege discrete and delimited activities. Do plans in such formats, though seemingly pivoting rationality, become useful and meaningful tools for faculties to get organized?

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2. Case Study Data

We explored this question with the help of interview data from the seven school sites. Our interview partners can be differentiated into five groups: those that were the writers of the plans or dealt with the plan in an administrative capacity; those that professed to know their school's plan and to implement it faithfully; those that deemed the school improvement plan important, but did not know it; those that admitted to ignorance; and finally those that knew the plan, but rejected its positive function for school improvement. Across these groups, school improvement planning was primarily seen as a requirement that one must comply with:

> *Interviewer: What about the school improvement plan?*
>
> *Respondent*: Well, we had a meeting the last in-service day we had. That was it. It's not open for debate. (A-6)
>
> *Respondent:* It's very important because I can't do my job unless I follow that plan that we devised. It's that last year everything was so rush, rush, that the committees that were set up, they had a certain amount of time to get things done, and I talked with several teachers and we don't ever remember being informed of what was in the school improvement [plan]. (A-13)
>
> *Respondent:* I don't really feel as though I've had a big part in the plan. Just making sure that I'm implementing and doing what has been set for our area. (B-11)
>
> *Interviewer: As a teacher, how do you see your role in the school improvement plan and the school improvement process?*
>
> *Respondent:* It was required. I mean, that's my role, to do whatever's required. (B-12)
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think there's a general buy-in to the plan here at the school?*
>
> *Respondent:* Yeah. And I think it's more or less we didn't have a choice. I think the [SIP is] more from the administration, not necessarily the school; the administration makes the decisions. I think if I asked for it then I probably could get a copy of it. (G-14)

> *Respondent:* I work from the school improvement plan, period!
>
> *Interviewer: What do you mean by that?*
>
> *Respondent:* I mean that everything that I do is related to that plan in some kind of way, to see that it's implemented and, you know, whatever is in there is carried out. (G-15)

Though the plans were seen as an external requirement, some saw benefits in compiling the plan, particularly administrators and teachers with special assignments, like this urban elementary school principal:

> What that document forced us to do was to begin to take a look at our school, and to look at it in critical areas. We were satisfied that our kids were coming to school. But then when we looked at it, we were able to say, "Well this specific group has difficulty getting to school. This group comes consistently." (E-7)

Ms. Little was a senior teacher in her edge-city middle school. Being relieved of regular classroom duties, she played a triple role as reading specialist, program coordinator, and test coordinator at her school. As one of the major plan writers, she was very active in school improvement:

> It's [the SIP] been real helpful in seeing what we are doing. What *are* our programs? In looking at our MSPAP data, and being guided by an administrator who understands what the data is saying, and in a certain sense that was a good thing in her newness. She could look at it from, not such an invested way as myself, who *knew* those kids last year that took MSPAP, you know, and I wish I could go to them all now and say, "What happened?"...It's made us talk about things that otherwise we wouldn't have. And so, again, even that hasn't been negative, except that, like today, you've got ten things to do, and you've just got to find time to do them all....You know a lot of times you repeat things that aren't going right, and you don't see it 'cause you're so into it....We are looking at changing the schedule. We spend too much time administratively in lunches...So those are the kinds of things that this has made us look at. And so again, though it's true deadlines, and it's definitely some pressure that I haven't felt before, in this way, it's not been bad. (A-3)

Ms. Davis taught in a middle school where probation resulted in a very pro-active stance of the principal. Her school adopted a variety of easily-monitored measures that were to intensify instruction, such as the school-wide use of timers:

> I believe it [the SIP] makes sense. I believe that we need to focus more and more, I guess all the time, on the implementation of, the nature of the implementation is coming along correctly, and I think [the principal] has some pretty good plans, and looking at, you know, just checking with us, seeing what's going on, asking us questions about what works, what doesn't work. I think, overall, the process of dealing with the [daily lesson plans] is very effective. Teachers are getting time-on-task skills more ingrained in themselves, therefore, it's more ingrained in the students. So that works very well. It's sort of like a habitual thing now, where we have it, and they're even looking for, "Well, how much time do we have?" or they're asking questions, they're looking for their time. Because we know they want us to get over this, so there's more and more stress put on time, you know. So, we want to have them prepared for that. The MSPAP is timed, and they need to be able to get a certain amount of things done in a certain amount of time, which is good, and we practice that. It's just the everyday part of what we do now. (B-10, classroom teacher)

Teachers, according to the interviews, perceived the SIP as valuable because it provided the faculty with common goals and strategies, even though the latter were, in most cases, not formulated or enforced by the teachers themselves:

> I would say the benefit that we have is simply because we made, we have a guide to go by. That is the only benefit. But I think that could have been done even if we weren't recon-eligible. So, other than us having one particular guide, where everybody knows what should be done, there haven't been any. (C-8)

> [Last year] we had a piece of curriculum guide that we didn't really, you know, it laid up on the desk. Maybe one day we didn't know what we wanted to do, we would look at it. But, everybody is using [it] this year. You know, for each academic area. So, it's made a definite change in the continuity and consistency for the kids. (A-13)

Interestingly, while the idea of common goals and strategies found support among some, the concomitant standardization of routines and practices was more troublesome, if not outright ludicrous to some respondents:

> It [the SIP] showed us a goal. The difference is putting a name to what we're doing. The difference is quoting the plan, meaning that we've always had a plan.... Now, it's more so a uniformity, and I don't, I say that's an improvement, but at the same time I see – I don't know. I'm an individual, and I feel that my classroom should be individualized. (B-12)
>
> For you to tell me that you want my notebook on the right-hand side of my desk, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to, because that's just...and I'm not being disobedient, I'm not leaving my authority, because I have a high level of respect for authority. I respect the position. I don't always respect the person, but I always respect the position, and I'll always do it. But, I'm sorry, you do not tell me, no state person, you're not going to tell me how to organize my desk. (B-9)

The Writing and Compilation of the Plans

In all schools the plans were written by small groups of teachers. Often it became the primary responsibility of one or two individuals. The principals were strongly involved, but the actual writing was in most cases delegated to resource teachers who worked outside the classroom and were given release time for this task. Plan writing was not part of the routine operations of school. Indeed, plan writers emphasized the extraordinary time it took to write the plan, keeping them away from normal duties.

Writers and administrators from all schools described the writing process as arduous. Upon identification, a school had only a few weeks to compile the first draft of the plan, during which time plan writers had to consult various groups and individuals within the school. The extent and intensity of this internal consultation varied from school to school. Respondents from one elementary school mentioned a form of planning that involved teachers and community members. But in most schools, compiling the plan involved teachers with special roles in the school, such as department heads, testing coordinators, etc.:

> Well they [the plan writers] have to have so much information and so someone – and of course the principal has been the key person, but in all fairness, unless you take a teacher out of a class where she – you take the ones that can put the materials together, so you're taking your seasoned veterans, but somebody has to do that. And in the time frame, which you must admit was pretty compressed….About people being brought out of the classroom, we've tried working, we work after school. We've done weekends. I mean, so, it's not just that we see this as the only time when we can work. But to get a lot of the people who have second jobs, you have to depend on day time when we can work. (A-3, plan writer)

Plan writers did not mention a substantial role of the faculty at large in the writing process. If the faculty was involved, it was less likely that they were decision makers and more likely that they were information providers. A principal in one of the middle schools described the process in this way:

> We always sent down information to let the staff know what we are working on, what's involved in it, what we need from them, what they have to submit by which date, and we get what we need in on time and then we're able to file it and go from there. (A-1)

Plan writers' and administrators' gaze was directed outward rather than inward. Passing muster with district and state authorities was their primary concern. In the interviews, planners described vividly how they repeatedly revised their drafts to accommodate various demands and suggestions from the district office. District offices, on their part, felt scrutinized by the state monitoring office and felt beholden to the state officials' standards and formats for a good plan that could finally be approved by the state board of education. In many schools, plan writers expressed in interviews or informally how sensitive they were about the quality ratings and comments the drafts received from external reviewers.

In many instances, the original drafts submitted by the school required extensive revisions. Plan writers and administrators from most schools were not quite sure what would pass as an acceptable plan. Mixed messages from external reviewers made the task more burdensome, in the view of many respondents:

> There wasn't much input from the rest of the staff. Small modifications were made, but there wasn't a lot of overall interaction. We all had our section and we wrote. [The principal] would get it, approve it, make his comments, give it back, revise, revise, revise, revise, about twenty times, and then you put it all together to make sure it had continuity and it flowed. Then, from, I would say January, once we came back to school, all the way to May, and so, it took a lot of weekends to make your draft to have it ready Monday morning so you could submit it. And then the state got in, and they sent it back, with their revisions. And so, that happened about two or three times, and so, during this constant revision of different parts, and different people seem to contradict what the other said...the state, the county people say yes, then the state people say no, or even the state office representative will say yes, but then the head chief gets it, says no. (B-12)
>
> They [the local office] weren't even clear on what the plan should look like. They were never, that was never out there. We were always, I always had the feeling it was a cat and mouse game to begin with. It was, we would write something and submit it, and they would say no, but they wouldn't say it should be this way (E-7, principal).

In some cases, negotiations between administrators and external reviewers were intense, even over small details:

> Well, the revisions that we did were basically, for example, there's a list that [the district] makes a comparison among the state scores, the [district] school scores, and this school. That I wanted to incorporate in the plan because of the fact that it showed that we were doing better than the median score of [the district] and that we were closer to the state. At one time it was suggested that we not use that, and I said, "Why not?" Well, because some of the scores didn't indicate that there had been a great deal of improvement, and that wasn't as important to me as the fact that overall they showed improvement, or they showed where we were doing *better* than [the district] in terms of the median scores. So, why not show it? I mean, that to me was a feather in our cap. So I wanted it there. And, ok. It's there. It's in the plan. (G-4, principal)

In this situation, some of our interview partners called for some kind of model that would make it clear to the school what was expected of them in terms of the plan's form and content. Planners at the schools felt that officials must have some ideas as to what they want the plans to look like, otherwise, why wouldn't they share this information directly with schools?

> I guess what I question is why do we have to do this very expensive report saying this is what we're going to do or this is what we have in place? ...I feel that if they targeted our school as being reconstitution eligible, they must know what was in place and what was not working out of those that were in place....We were not successful, what makes you think we're going to be so successful now? Why aren't you bringing in people from another school or just the reconstitution team to say, "Hey, this is a means of making sure that you can become a success." What's been proven to work? Share that with us. Share the findings of success from any other school. That has not been done. Then you're just gritting your teeth. You want this report. So you've got it in paper. I'm not impressed. I'm not impressed that we have anything that's going to work. (A-4, assistant principal)

> I suppose it would have been a good idea to have a finished plan, so that we could have looked at one that had been approved by the state, so that, not necessary, not necessarily to copy it, but to use it as a model so that revisions would not have to constantly be made. (G-4, principal)

Lastly, plan writers pointed to a lack of school site capacity in conducting sophisticated data analyses demanded by the planning template:

> I think we need to be taught how to write a decent school improvement plan. We need to know how to analyze our data. We need to know what goes into a good plan. And I'm talking about we as administrators. That's the kind of training that we desperately need, and not in isolation from our staff. Teachers need to learn these same things with us. I don't want to dictate to this staff where we're going, and what we're doing, and how we're going to get there. I want us to develop that together, which is what our team did with our plan. We wrote that thing together. (F-7, principal)

All schools relied on the support from district personnel. While some schools, particularly those that had been identified at the inception of the program, felt left alone and overwhelmed in this process, others praised their district office for the help they were given. In all cases, the writers felt steered by, or at the whim of, external district or state personnel. Writers and administrators from almost all schools reported that when the final drafts were eventually returned to the schools the plans had been rewritten again without input from the school, and content had changed substantially:

> Our school improvement plan was written last year, with the staff's input, but only those staff members, truly only those staff members that were part of the SBMT, School-Based Management Team. A lot of the components of the English/Reading Department were not developed and correlated to the department as a whole. It was just something put in by the English Department Chair, without any collaboration. To me, from what I can see and what is on there, when that plan reached its stage of getting to the county level, where it had to be revised again, it had been changed. And certain things were changed in the plan that were not originally written, which I'm assuming that the county felt should be changed, before it was admitted to the state. So when we got it back there were things that were changed. But even prior to that, there, to me, was not enough collaboration to make that plan truly what it should have been made. (A-16)

Presumably, the review process was used to oblige schools to adopt particular views and strategies deemed correct or effective by district or state officials, a presumption that was confirmed in an interview with an official from one of the districts.

Knowledge, Involvement, Ownership

When teachers were asked on the survey questionnaire if they knew their school improvement plan and if they could recite the plan's quantitative goals, a surprising number of teachers answered in the affirmative.[3] Two-thirds of respondents professed at least some knowledge and close to two-thirds claimed they could recite at least some quantitative goals. But a more nuanced picture emerges when we look at qualitative data. When we asked about the plan in the interviews, responses from teachers other than plan writers, administrators, and outright critics of the plans tended to be brief, if not terse, as the following typical responses indicate:

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[3] It should be noted here that in some schools response rates were low and highly involved teachers and administrators tended to be over-represented in our sample.

> *Interviewer: What do you know about your school improvement plan?*
>
> *Respondent:* I know that they make us where we're accountable for it, so...
>
> *Interviewer: Do you have one?*
>
> *Respondent:* I do. It's thick.
> *Interviewer: All right. Does it drive...*
>
> *Respondent:* Oh, it definitely drives this program.
>
> *Interviewer: Does it, really?*
>
> *Respondent:* Front seat.
>
> *Interviewer: Does the school, does the plan make sense to you as a teacher?*
>
> *Respondent:* It does, I think the goals are meetable, you know, given *time*. And, you know, that's what the kids need, they need *time*.
>
> *Interviewer: Were you involved in helping to design it?*
>
> *Respondent:* No.
>
> *Interviewer: Do you see things that may not make sense, that you might want to change, or modify?*
>
> *Respondent:* I kind of think most of it makes sense. (B-1)

> *Interviewer: What do you know about the school improvement plan in this school?*
>
> *Respondent:* I think they have a pretty good one.

Interviewer: Have you ever attended a meeting?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Have you seen the school improvement plan?

Respondent: I think we did see it.

Interviewer: What do you think is in it?

Respondent: Ways to improve the school. I think ours is broken down into, isn't it math, reading? (E-12)

Interviewer: Have you finished reading the school improvement plan?

Respondent: I've seen it.

Interviewer: Have you?

Respondent: I mean, I've seen it, I'm familiar with it. It's a lot of let's change the percentages, let's increase this, and it's important, but it's another example of teaching as a science. If we could kind of modify these numbers things will be better. (G-1)

Interviewer: Tell me about the school improvement plan.

Respondent: I can't. I haven't read it. I've been introduced to it, I just haven't read it, because to me, that's just more political paperwork. If you can't follow through with it, if you are an administrator and your hands are tied...they evaluate principals on things like attendance. Ok, but principals that are too concerned about their attendance are not going to suspend anybody. (G-6)

At the time of data collection, in none of the schools, with perhaps one exception, were the plans an outcome of a broad-based internal communication process that could have clarified directions and motivated actions faculty-wide. Both the tight time lines for the submission of the plans and the orientation of administrators and planners towards complying with new external mandates preempted such a process. Once the plan was written, dissemination was an administrative process or left up to chance: "Well, I'm on the school improvement team, which, of course, everyone's invited to be a part of it. So, unless someone just is not wanting to be involved, they've had opportunities, and the documents have been there for them to read, in the office (A-3)."

The strong external steering of the writing process, the overwhelming concern of plan writers and administrators for passing the external review, and the abbreviated internal communication process among faculty resulted in a feeble sense of ownership of the plans at the school site. As was mentioned above, in some schools principals and plan writers themselves stated that they did not recognize the final drafts as their own product. In some instances, department heads and instructional specialists did not feel that they were connected to the final product.

> I chair the Social Studies department. But in all honesty, the part of the plan that's written there is not mine because of the way that it was developed last year. There are many, many parts of the plan that people do not, there was no input from those people. In other words, there's social studies there, but the way in which the plan was developed, social studies, the social studies department did not actually develop the majority of that. It was done by several people who were subbed throughout the day, or several weeks, and they wrote it. I follow my curriculum. We have a new curriculum...we have a new curriculum guide this year. It's basically still the same, but a different guide. (A-7)

A former member of the school improvement team expressed her frustration with lack of ownership:

> I used to be on the team but I got off because of the fact that it's still, regardless of what the school improvement team, they say, is supposed to be the decision makers for the school. But that's not necessarily so because they had to go to a board that sits down, and they go through it, and they refine it, and they pull things out that they don't like and tell you, you have to change this, and you have to change that. And when it comes back, it's not your product so, that's the reason I got off because it still didn't help. It wasn't ours. We don't have a say so. That's a waste of time. All that, the school improvement plan, is just for formality. Just to

> say that the school has a voice in what goes on in their school, and it's not necessarily so if you're going to change it. Well, all of us have a copy of the school improvement plan. Every person that works here. But, I mean, it's rarely used, it's rarely used. In the midst of everything else we have to do, people aren't going to sit down and read through a school improvement plan. (D-24)

Sense of ownership was further diminished due to high teacher and administrator turnover. In addition to large numbers of teachers (up to 50 percent in some schools) arriving at the beginning of the school year and leaving at the end, most of the schools experienced a change of principals around the time they became reconstitution-eligible. Compiling the SIP ensues when the school is identified as reconstitution-eligible in the spring; identification is based on the performance scores of the previous year. The school year is almost over by the time the plan is approved. As a result, we encountered administrators and teachers who did not feel they owned the problem since they had arrived at the school a year after the decline, and those who did not own the solution since they freshly arrived in the new school year. Now they were "stuck" with a formally codified and officially sanctioned plan whose wisdom seemed questionable at times. With additional planning iterations, some schools, or at least the core of improvement activists, seem to have gained a greater sense of control and ownership if leadership remained fairly stable.

The constant influx of new teachers led to increasing numbers of new and inexperienced teachers in many reconstitution-eligible schools. These new teachers were often oblivious to whole school reform concerns, and school improvement plans were often irrelevant to them. A senior teacher from a very unstable middle school that has been "reconstitution-eligible" for three years explained:

> *Interviewer: So the school improvement plan, does that actually drive what is happening here at the school in terms of curriculum?*
>
> *Respondent:* It does for a portion of our teachers, but remember we have all the new teachers. They don't even know what the school improvement

> plan is, much less how to use it. They're too busy trying to write a lesson plan. They're not interested in the school improvement plan and when we talk about school improvement, they're looking at the school as it is today, not how it was last year and we're trying to improve it or how it was five years ago. They're only concerned with the day to day operations. So in that we are not using the school improvement plan as effectively as we should because we don't have the staff to understand the data and set the data and have a vision to improve. (D-23)

A first year teacher from another school confirmed this statement in these words:

> You had to have been here last year, and I guess when they first started the plan, I mean, 'cause a lot of it's confusing. And being a first-year teacher, I'm just trying to do the best job I can for my kids. ...Helping them out after school. Really it's like, it's background information and I don't understand, but I know if I do my part, then I'm doing, you know, the right part as far as the school improvement plan. (A-11)

School Site Differences

While the patterns we have discussed so far apply across all schools, characteristic differences between school sites are discernable, particularly in the way the school handles the plan once it is approved by the accountability agency. The approaches of three of the seven school sites may illustrate this point. At two of the three sites, planning and writing was done by small cadres of teachers and administrators, sometimes two or three individuals.

In one fairly large elementary school (School C), the reading specialist, on release from regular classroom duties, took it upon herself to compile the plan. At the core of the plan was a reading curriculum that this particular teacher designed for the school. Her principal empowered her to implement this curriculum in all primary grade classrooms for which she furnished daily lesson plans. Here, the plan guided the administrative team and was carried out indirectly as teachers complied with the daily curriculum.

In another school (School B), a medium-sized middle school, the first time around the plan was compiled by a small team with much input from the faculty, the second time around it was rewritten and updated by the instructional specialist. At School B, the plan became the blueprint for action. The SIP loomed large in weekly team meetings with the principal and the instructional specialist. During those meetings, teachers were constantly reminded of the urgency to improve. They were informed of current goals, the principal's expectations of visible teaching practices in the classrooms, and the specialists' latest ideas about effective practices.

In one large middle school (School A) the plan was of lesser importance. The plan in operation at the time of data collection had not been designed by the new leadership team. Knowledge of the plan was not widespread among faculty. The new administration's first priority was to reestablish order and student discipline. Though the school had experienced a severe crisis in this area during the previous school year, student discipline did not figure prominently in the approved plan. The plan was therefore of little relevance for the challenges of the day.

Summary and Discussion

We learn from the interviews that the compilation of the plans in the seven schools was done mainly by a small core of administrators and activists. The writing process itself was fundamentally steered from outside the school. Not only was improvement planning embedded in a stringent accountability system whose posture was reinforced by the schools' probationary status, but schools were also given a template that pre-structured planning tasks and content. Moreover, the writing was micro-managed by district and state agencies, and the final product was "fine-tuned" so it reflected official preferences or could meet state board approval. While site administrators and plan writers felt beholden to, at times, murky external expectations, faculty participation in planning was limited to the provision of information. Regular classroom teachers were less frequently consulted as experts, and rarely did they participate as decision makers. With the exception of one school, a broadly based consultation process was lacking.

The content analysis revealed what kinds of plans were produced under these conditions. The plans showed strong signs of alignment. Site goals mimicked official quantitative performance goals, needs analysis took its clues from performance indicators, and a good portion of intended activities revolved around the state's ambitious and pedagogically complex learning achievement test. But on the other hand, the plans were comprehensive to a fault and only loosely tailored to internal faculty capacity, perhaps creating a condition of change overload rather than strategic focus; that is, if all intended activities were implemented faithfully. Such sweeping implementation was less likely considering that the plans lacked signs of internalization. The enumeration of mainly externally attributed causes of decline reads more like a plea to the public for leniency than an examination of the schools' problems – a "rational" approach, perhaps, taken by schools which in many cases are truly embattled by their social environment.

Site administrators and teachers with special assignments, who signed responsible for the lion's share of intended activities, were inclined to see the beneficial internal effects of SIPs as occasions for reflection, even though they some bemoaned the extraordinary burden of writing and revising the plan. Regular classroom teachers, by contrast, exhibited very superficial knowledge of their school's SIP. A general lack of ownership of the plans, which in some schools extended to traditional leadership roles (e.g., department heads), pervade the interviews as a theme. This dearth of knowledge and ownership notwithstanding, teachers expressed a strong willingness to comply with the plan. Some teachers explicitly stated their compliance with the admittedly unknown. The high degree of SIP knowledge indicated by teachers' self-reports on the survey, that could not be confirmed by qualitative interviews, may find an explanation in this readiness to comply. Many regular teachers accepted the SIP as a tool used by the site administration to focus the faculty and to standardize operations. Bitter opposition was rare, but when it was verbalized it was directed against standardization and loss of autonomy.

What does our analysis of the content and usage of school improvement plans tell us about the dynamic of school change under conditions of high-stakes accountability and imposed sanctions? The 46 analyzed plans and data from the seven sites give testimony to the success of the state to involve schools and districts in the compilation of an impressive, largely standardized document that strongly reflects the accountability agency's model of school change. Most likely, this involvement did not extend to the large majority of regular classroom teachers, but it forced the most active parts of the teaching force, administrators and career teachers with special assignments, to apply the state's lens to their problem of underperformance and, at the very least, to symbolically align their own view of change with the state's program. Despite widespread complaints, the SIP gave plan writers occasion for a thorough learning experience, an exercise in aligning their mental models (Senge, 1994) with the thinking of the accountability agency. In the more passive parts of the teaching force, the SIP gave occasion for an activation of, at times stultifying, compliance.

The role of improvement plans in the internal development of the schools is less clear. At best, it seems to function as an officially sanctioned lever that site administrators can use to demand unified action from faculties. In our sample of seven schools, this only happens when the principal backs the plan with a thorough internal monitoring system. Otherwise the plan is widely ignored. Considering the enormous time and energy that is spent on compiling the plan, the plan is, at worst, an albatross that distracts educators from the actual business of making schools better. Our case demonstrates both the penetrating power of accountability systems in eliciting obligations to external demands and in shaping managerial models of change and their limitations in bringing forth broadly-based internal development.

3. Comparison of Accountability Designs

The conclusions so far are restricted to the inner workings of one accountability system's design. It is conceivable that other systems with design features that more loosely measure performance or that more explicitly bridge the external/internal divide result in different dynamics. School accountability designs differ across jurisdictions with regard to the indicators for identifying and selecting failing schools, the nature of the threatened sanctions, and the extent of external monitoring and technical assistance offered to, or imposed on, schools. We compare plans written within the Maryland accountability system with those from Kentucky and San Francisco. In looking at the three selected accountability designs we ask how differences among them may impact the way the plans are written. The data from Maryland expose schools that tackle improvement with a pattern of external obligation and internal managerialism. Change strategies show some focus and alignment to the external performance demands of the system, but also signs of ineffective comprehensiveness. The plans lack signs of internalization. Does this pattern repeat itself in the other two jurisdictions, or do we find patterns that differ in terms of focus and alignment of change strategies and internalization of goals and expectations? And do these pattern differences correspond with different accountability design features?

We highlight two design features of the systems that are most relevant for our analysis: the way the systems measure performance, and the way they bridge external demands with internal development (see Table V.3). The two state accountability designs are quite similar in many respects. They are driven by a few quantitative performance indicators, center around a largely performance-based test, have highly ambitious growth targets for all schools, focus on student achievement, and bestow rewards to and impose sanctions on schools based on quantitative performance records. By contrast, the San Francisco accountability system evaluates performance based on a package of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Among the quantitative indicators are the California Test of Basic Skills and data on truancy, attendance, suspension, student drop-outs, transfers, funds, and staffing patterns. In addition, qualitative indicators are used by an on-site review committee to evaluate the school. Goals for the accountability system broadly touch upon student achievement, parent and community participation, safe learning environments, and an integrated instructional and social support program for students, particularly with respect to the education of African-American and Hispanic students. Thus, a rather fluid way of performance evaluation and a rather broad productivity and equity agenda in the San Francisco accountability system contrasts with relatively narrow performance measurements and goals in the two state systems. We hypothesize, therefore, to find more pronounced patterns of focus and programmatic alignment in the SIPs from the two state systems as compared to the plans from San Francisco.

While the two state systems are similar in many respects, they are different in a key component. Probationary schools in Kentucky are assigned a so-called Distinguished Educator/ Highly Skilled Educator who represents the accountability system and attaches him/herself to the internal change process at the school. The Maryland design does not contain such a bridging role. Hence, we hypothesize a more pronounced pattern of internalization in the Kentucky plans if system design differences, indeed, shape schools' responses.

Table V.3 – Three Accountability System Designs in Comparison

	Maryland	Kentucky	San Francisco
Performance indicators (quantitative)	Achievement (MSPAP, MFT) Attendance	Achievement (CATS previously KIRIS) Attendance Retention Dropout rates Successful transition to adult life	Achievement (CTBS) Attendance Drop-out Transfers Suspensions Truancy referrals
Performance indicators (qualitative)			School improvement plan School portfolio Presentation to district committee
External/internal bridge	State monitor (external supervision) Local assistance	"Distinguished Educator" "Highly Skilled Educator" (external supervision/ internal change agent)	District administrator liaison Local evaluation committee

Synopsis of Findings

Do the plans show evidence of focus and alignment of strategies and internalization of external expectations, and do policy design differences make a difference in the schools' responses as expressed in the plans? To reiterate, we hypothesized stronger focus and a tighter alignment for the two state systems relative to the San Francisco system, and a higher degree of internalization for the Kentucky case as compared to the Maryland case. Table V.4 displays a synopsis of findings from the content analysis across the three systems.

Table V.4 - Patterns in School Improvement Plans Across Three Accountability Systems

	Maryland	Kentucky	San Francisco
Median number of activities per school	46	23	52
Activity domains :			
* Organization	4 (9%)	3 (14%)	5 (10%)
* Governance	3 (6%)	1 (4%)	2 (4%)
* Climate + attendance	7 (17%)	4 (17%)	9 (19%)
* Parents + community	5 (11%)	4 (16%)	9 (18%)
* Curriculum + instruct.	11 (25%)	8 (31%)	15 (26%)
* Prof. Development	9 (22%)	4 (15%)	6 (11%)
* Teacher performance	4 (10%)	1 (5%)	5 (11%)
Primary activity domain	Curriculum and instruction	Curriculum and instruction	Parents + community and climate
Primary activity within Curriculum and Instruction	Test practice District sponsored workshops	Curriculum alignment Remediating identified weaknesses	Remediating curricular weaknesses On-going experimentation with instruction
Collegiality/ commitment activities	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Goals	External quantitative goals, no interpretation	External quantitative goals, no interpretation	External goals and district-sanctioned objectives
Causes of decline	70% external attribution	30% external attribution	n/a
Philosophy/mission	Generic, "conventional wisdom"	Generic, "conventional wisdom"	50% unique 50% aligned with district

Focus

As for the Maryland plans, we examined the median number of activities schools proposed to undertake in a given school year and the dispersion of these activities across the various activity domains (i.e. organization, governance, climate, parents, curriculum and instruction, professional development). Confirming the Maryland pattern, content analysis shows that the number of activities planned by schools on probation for the school year were staggering in the three accountability systems (SF 52; MD 46; KY 31 median). Proposed activities were spread widely across all domains. This occurred independently of design differences among the three accountability systems, with some noteworthy differences. Kentucky schools were the most focused *relative to the other two jurisdictions,* as indicated by the lowest number of median activities listed, while that number is highest in San Francisco. But even in Kentucky the lower number of median activities was spread across all activity domains in proportions similar to the other systems. The most frequently listed activities in the plans of all three systems were activities in the curriculum and instruction (C&I) domain (MD 26%; KY 31%; SF 26%). These proportions increased if one includes some C&I related *professional development* and *teacher performance* activities into the C&I domain. But in none of the systems did curriculum and instruction activities reach past the 50 percent mark.

In sum, while modest emphasis was placed on instructional reform in the plans, this did not stop schools from dispersing activities across all activity domains. An approach of covering the whole territory of school change prevails. This approach was encouraged by the writing templates that states and districts provided to schools. Thus, despite stringent school performance assessments based on student learning in Maryland and Kentucky, schools in the two state systems felt compelled either to tackle a whole gamut of problems or to demonstrate the completeness and comprehensiveness of their efforts to the evaluating public. Differences among the three systems with respect to focus did occur as indicated by the median number of activities. It is possible that the more diffuse performance assessment gauges in the case of San Francisco resulted in a wider dispersion of strategies as compared to the two state systems; though relatively similar assessment indicators in Maryland and Kentucky still coincided with different median numbers of activities. It is conceivable that the assistance from DE/HSE's helped the schools to focus. Although, as we saw in Part IV, quite a number of teachers in the four Kentucky schools did not see their DE/HSE's as very effective or very central to their school's improvement effort, they did report that DE/HSE's worked on focusing the schools on key features of the state curriculum, such as writing, portfolios, and curriculum alignment and that they were strongly involved in writing the school plan. Some DE/HSE's especially mention in the interviews their concern for their schools' strategic focus:

> You would be astonished of the vast numbers of persons we have coming into the building to look at it. It's really too much. We really need to look at what is happening in terms of… Not just looking at, but programs, because people who are really concerned about the building will say, "Hey, we've got this program, you need to do it." What the school must do, and what we've started doing now, is focus. We've started looking at the school plan again, and part of what we're doing is making certain that all of the programs that we have in this building at this time are being spoken to in a coordinated method in the school plan. If they don't fit in, we're going to ask to have them removed and we're also going to ask not to have any more programs added next year so that we can focus our attention and our energies on working with the kids to be successful at what it is we now have in the building. What it is that the school needs to do in order to be successful is to focus its energy. That's organizationally. (KY 40-09, DE/HSE)

Alignment

This concept refers to both goal formation and strategies. With respect to goals, we examined the congruence of goals stated in the plans with external expectations and the way schools-on-probation reflected on a possible gap between past and future performance. With respect to strategies, we examined the congruence of specific activities with the performance indicators and assessments of the accountability system.

Externally generated goals were incorporated into the plans unaltered by almost all schools in the three systems. This could have been expected since a key component of external accountability systems is their insistence on "crystalline-clear" (Hanushek, 1994) and pre-established goals which limit school autonomy to choosing the means of achieving these goals. But it is conspicuous that goals in plans from all three accountability systems were almost never interpreted in view of site conditions and realistic growth expectations on the part of practitioners. We described the Maryland pattern in the previous section. In Kentucky, schools were given growth targets that were calculated for schools by the accountability agency. These growth targets were invoked in all school improvement plans. As in Maryland, no reflection on discrepancies between high expectations and past performance records was evident, but in the Kentucky case, promised future growth was more in line with past performance. In San Francisco, schools listed qualitative goals that were mere restatements of official district goals and policy statements. In sum, goals were strictly aligned with external quantitative or qualitative expectations. In all likelihood, schools were given no choice or leeway as to what goals they considered realistic to achieve. What may, on one hand, appear as an impressive alignment gain, may turn out, on the other hand, to be a serious liability for internalizing external expectations.

Differences occurred among the three systems. Programmatic alignment was more strongly in place in the two state systems with their looming student achievement tests and stringent quantitative performance indicators than in the San Francisco plans which were written in the context of less prescriptive and less directive performance objectives. In Maryland, schools tailored many improvement activities to the test (writing, portfolio, test-taking skills) and to curricular and staff development initiatives put forth by districts to meet state demands. In Kentucky, a similar emphasis on assessment-related technologies was observable. But here relatively more emphasis was placed on curriculum alignment and the remediation of identified curricular weaknesses. In San Francisco, the array of suggested activities was broader, and instructional improvement was connected with experimentation more so than alignment.

"Alignment" of a different sort takes place independently of specific accountability system designs. In plans from all three accountability systems, educators hailed extended services, assemblies, awards, displaying student work, tightening attendance procedures, more enforcement of discipline, and increased parent involvement as a means to improve the organization. In the area of curriculum and instruction, schools deemed, among others, the installment of packaged programs, portfolios, the writing process, test awareness, interdisciplinary approaches, and computer technology as promising strategies.

How can these similarities be explained? Some of the highlighted activities were school routines, such as awards assemblies, that schools had traditionally used to influence school climate. While it is conceivable that those activities fell into disuse in schools on probation, they were certainly not innovative. Other highlighted activities (e.g., school-wide discipline programs) spoke directly to the orthodoxies of the effective school model that has garnered powerful support among efficiency-oriented external accountability agencies and seems to drive school improvement planning. Clearly, the stress on test-taking skills is a common reflex of schools to the increasing urgency external agencies and the public place on tests. Lastly, ideas such as the writing process, portfolios, and inter-disciplinarity have recently gained strong currency as legitimate innovations in professional circles. The societal legitimacy of computer technology is self-evident considering the sentiments of the times. Thus, differences notwithstanding, the analyzed school improvement plans across all three accountability systems have in common an "alignment" of activities to regular school routines, common reflexes, legitimate models of effective schools, and innovations touted by the profession.

Internalization

For the analysis of this concept we again took up the issue of goals and activities; we asked further whether schools used the philosophy section of the plan to profile their uniqueness or address local conditions; and we examined to what degree schools attributed their troubles to external or internal conditions. While the literature generally treats internalization of external accountability demands as a problem, we hypothesized earlier that due to the bridging function of the Distinguished Educator/ Highly Skilled Educator we may find more evidence of internalization in the Kentucky plans as compared to the Maryland plans.[4]

We saw earlier that in the area of goals, schools were strongly driven by external demands. While schools may have been rather constrained in their goal formation, they could have used the philosophy sections (e.g., mission, vision) to highlight a more site-specific brand of school improvement. This was mostly not the case. We saw that in the Maryland plans philosophy and mission statements tended to be boiler plate, conventional, and casting a wide net. Kentucky plans displayed similar patterns, though the most popular tenets varied slightly. Only in the San Francisco plans did we find references to school-site specific conditions. In about half the plans, statements about schools' interaction with specific ethnic communities surfaced. These exceptions notwithstanding, schools overall do not use the philosophy section to profile their organizational uniqueness or to document moral decisions, for example a decision for or against tracking; rather they cover a swath of at times contradictory tenets that have high symbolic currency in the present reform environment.

Similarly, as was pointed out above, action plans (i.e. lists of activities) suffered from the same comprehensive approach as schools tended to cover a whole spectrum of activities and activity domains rather than adopting a more strategic or staged developmental approach. Levine and Leibert (1987) characterize this approach as an unproductive pattern of externally induced planning that serves primarily external purposes. In their view, rather than being used as tools for internal school development, such plans serve to demonstrate compliance with external demands or pressures. The infrequent mentioning of activities in the area of teacher commitment and collegiality, which was the focus of the earlier restructuring movement of educational reform, could be a further indication that schools have understood the current winds of educational reform. Schools may shun the impression of expending resources on themselves, rather than on improving their services.

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[4] We did not formulate such hypotheses for San Francisco since the plans were not sufficiently analytical to allow for that kind of analysis.

Despite these similarities across the three accountability systems, differences between the two state systems in the degree of internalization are indicated in our data. First, while Maryland plans place the strongest emphasis in the curriculum and instruction domain on packaged programs, test awareness, and district initiatives, Kentucky "schools in decline" feature more prominently school-internal curriculum alignment activities. Another remarkable contrast between the two state systems is evident in the way schools analyze "causes of decline." While Maryland schools located about 70 percent of all mentioned causes in the external environment, Kentucky schools did so in only 30 percent of all causes. Although under similar accountability pressures as Maryland schools, Kentucky schools presumably approached their task with a more inward-looking gaze, confirming our original hypothesis about differential system design effects. This pattern may be directly attributable to school site effects. Because of the method schools on probation are identified, Maryland schools are rock-bottom performers while Kentucky schools can be under-performers on various performance levels. It is conceivable that, on the whole, schools on probation in Maryland encounter more difficult socio-economic circumstances than Kentucky probationary schools so that Maryland schools might naturally look to their external environment to analyze "causes of decline." But we saw in Part III that Kentucky teachers in the four participating schools were just as likely as their Maryland colleagues to externalize causes of decline. Another explanation seems to be more plausible. Judging from the interviews conducted in the four schools, in at least two schools the DE/HSE played the explicit role of helping schools analyze their specific shortcomings in the area of curriculum and instruction:

> [The DE/HSE] helped us to see where our weaknesses were, to focus on, you know, working on our weaknesses. First you have to identify them and know where the loopholes are...and what you're leaving out of your curriculum, what you need to put in and she helped us immensely with that. Yeah, that. It's wonderful having these ladies come in and keeping some objective point of view. To be able to get out, they're not involved in all the rigamarole going on perhaps in the classroom daily so they can see things with fresh eyes and yes, that's a great part of the accountability system is having those people in the school to help us revamp and see where our weaknesses are and the rewards thing. (10-07, kindergarten teacher)

In sum, with regard to internalization the picture is mixed. Analyzed plans from the three accountability systems exhibited a strong bias towards demonstrating compliance with external demands in three respects: school goals were simply restatements of external goals unencumbered by site-specific analysis or reflection of putative performance gaps; philosophies, with the exception of some schools in San Francisco, were generic lists of cliches that can garner wide support internally and externally; and action plans consisted of a wide swath of activities that were either old routines or currently considered "best practice" by the schools' broader professional environment. While this pattern holds for schools from all three accountability systems, Kentucky plans showed the greatest sense of internalization as indicated by a relatively stronger emphasis in the area of curriculum and instruction around school-internal activities and by a pronounced internal attribution of causes. Data from the four schools suggest that this might be due to the influence of the state-delegated change agent.

4. Discussion

Despite differences, the similarities in the plans across all three jurisdictions are striking. The fairly large number of activities, the dispersion of activities across all areas of the organization, the kinds of activities chosen, the way goals are formulated and philosophies are written are fairly uniform across the three accountability systems. How can this isomorphism be explained? Perhaps schools following the lead of the designers of the planning templates interpreted the swath of correlates and philosophical tenets of the effective schools approach to mean that school improvement should be commensurably comprehensive. The effective schools model seems equally as strong in "aligning" strategies and programs as are specific performance indicators of the systems. Or it could be that a certain level of standardization in the business of school improvement has occurred through national professional and managerial influences constraining innovative options that schools feel safe to choose from or are knowledgeable about. The uniform pattern might also suggest that the writing of school improvement plans is primarily an exercise in following directions and compliance and shoring up external legitimacy, rather than a vehicle for internal development. In this case, following institutionalist theory, isomorphism can be expected (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The plans' uniformity demonstrate the power of vigorous accountability systems to institutionalize a clearly demarcated rational model of school improvement and an externally driven surface response of schools (and perhaps districts) to this model. In this way, the mandate of writing a SIP constrains schools to a specific view of educational reform, a peculiarly rationalized and standardized lens, that becomes part of a new set of "givens" (Malen & Muncey, 1999).

But accountability design differences do make a difference in schools' responses in a non-trivial way, and designers can learn from these differences to improve accountability systems. In San Francisco, more loosely structured performance indicators corresponded with more site variation and instructional experimentation, but they may also have created the impetus for rather voluminous and comprehensive action plans. In Kentucky, the presence of a trained change agent who could bridge the external/ internal divide corresponded with a heightened sense of internalization in the plans. Distinguished Educators/ Highly Skilled Educators may have helped schools to treat external accountability demands as internal challenges so that schools-in-decline in Kentucky tended to document those problems over which they exert a measure of control and engaged in aligning classroom instruction to the state curriculum. Where, as in the case of Maryland, the system combined stringent performance measures with the absence of a bridging agent, the external orientation is most pronounced and planning is presumably least tied to actual school development. In Maryland plans, test awareness, test practice, and the installation of new packaged programs loomed particularly large. Our findings suggest that high-stakes accountability systems do not, by virtue of their greater coherence and comprehensiveness, turn schools into rational and effective strategic planners – despite rational planning templates. But they do increase the momentum for a dynamic of "improving schools from without." The Kentucky case shows that specific design features may temper this tendency. Interestingly, the Maryland and Kentucky designs have recently converged: the plan templates have been streamlined in both systems; Kentucky made its strong change agent feature optional for schools while Maryland has slowly moved in the direction of more technical support and bridging.

PART VI. PROBATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE

High-stakes accountability systems address the issue of school improvement on many fronts. Clear performance goals in the form of quantitative growth targets and incentives in the form of rewards and sanctions are to motivate the individual teacher to increase work effort and to focus on teaching and learning. Group accountability, managerial mandates, and capacity building measures are to move the organization as a whole forward. But changes in work motivation and operations, programs, and organizational climate must ultimately funnel towards teachers' actions in their classrooms where learning has to become more intense if the school is to succeed. Furthermore, given the ambitious performance-based character of the accountability systems studied here, schools, in order to master probation successfully, not only need to compel students to work harder, but also learn differently. Higher work intensity, tighter lesson plans, but also higher order thinking, teamwork, verbalization, meta-cognition, deliberation, and reflective writing are paramount.

Classroom visits helped us understand how teachers connected to these performance demands. To this end, we needed to know how teachers taught, how they reflected on their teaching, how they interpreted the pedagogical demands of the performance-based assessments, and how they coped with the presumed gap between the high demands of the accountability system and the reality of their students' performance. We ask whether the observed teaching matched performance-based patterns required to be successful on the state assessments and whether that teaching justified the pervasive high sense of capacity that teachers exhibited in survey and interviews. Teachers cannot learn from their shortcomings if they are not aware of them. Their own "zone of

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proximal development" is limited by their actual teaching competence, but also by their reflective horizon (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). That is, a teacher may not teach well, but if he or she is satisfied with this situation, change is unlikely to occur. If teachers do not know how to identify weaknesses in their teaching based on student reactions and their own standards, they will not know what steps to take for improving their teaching. Thus, we need to understand teachers' reflective capacity in order to gain a sense of the potentiality for change. Accountability systems assume that performance problems are to a large degree caused by under-performing teachers and that performance deficits can be remedied by them. In this view, performance is seen as a function of will, rather than capacity. In a sense, a key function of accountability systems is to communicate to teachers high performance expectations and counteract presumed habitual underperformance in persistently low-performing schools. But teachers may have their own interpretation of this gap between external expectations and internal reality and their own way of coping with it.

We present data from the Maryland and Kentucky schools separately. In Maryland we visited more schools and observed more lessons so that we have a sufficient number of observations that make quantification useful. In the Maryland schools we visited 50 classrooms. We dropped from our analysis lessons for which we could not complete the full sequence of observation and debriefing. Likewise, some observation files were incomplete, bringing the number of observations to 30 lessons and debriefing interviews. In the four Kentucky schools, we observed 25 lessons, but again because of incomplete data only 15 are usable. Thus for the Kentucky schools our analysis is more impressionistic and brief.

1. Observed Lessons in the Maryland Schools

We described, in previous parts of this report, individual dispositions and organizational conditions that frame teachers' instruction and changes they may enact. We saw that large numbers of teachers in the 11 schools viewed themselves as highly competent professionals whose skills and knowledge measured up to the demands of the states' performance-based assessments. But at the same time, many teachers did not treat these assessments as gauges or standards of their own performance and quality. Rather, the accountability system was not personally meaningful and many deemed the assessments unfair, unrealistic and of questionable quality. Teachers' failure analysis was not personalized. Performance shortcomings were mainly attributed to factors over which teachers had little personal control.

Our study of organizational responses showed that probation in the Maryland schools was associated with a strengthening of organizational hierarchy and rigidity that fostered internal managerialism and compliance with external obligations to the detriment of organizational learning. As a result, lively conversations about performance goals, student learning and internal curricular changes were only feebly developed. Curricular change, in those Maryland schools where change actually took place, was mainly a function of external programs and determined actions on the part of principals and instructional specialists. On the average, teachers in schools that reacted to probation pro-actively and were moving towards instructional change tended to be even more skeptical about the accountability system, and their greater reported effort and engagement coincided with a perception of their work environment as more supportive, collegial, and capacity-enhancing. Moreover, while the performance demands of the accountability system call for an upgrading of the quality of the existing teaching force, in reality the investigated schools on probation struggled with high teacher turnover, low job commitment, and an increasing number of uncertified and inexperienced teachers. This is the situation in which we conducted classroom observations and engaged teachers in conversations about their classes.

As was discussed in Part I, we distinguish lessons according to two levels: basic and elaborate, in line with the ambitious goals of the performance-based accountability systems. A high quality basic lesson is conceptually coherent, i.e. it is organized around a central question or topic. Activities are related to this conceptual core. Materials and forms of interaction vary in order to stimulate student participation. The conceptual level of activities centers on factual recall, comprehension, and practice. Teachers lecture or engage students in recitation style dialogue or silent seatwork. In sum, good lessons on the basic level are coherent, vary material and forms of interaction, stress simple content or cognitive skills, and employ teacher-centered forms of dialogue that engage students willing to learn.

For schools to be successful in either states' performance-based assessment system, lessons have to be of high quality on a more elaborate level. They need to surpass the basic level by including opportunities for students to apply knowledge, generalize from examples, deliberate ideas, solve problems, evaluate answers, and reflect on process. During such lessons students are encouraged to work together in groups or with partners independent of the teacher and engage in more complex forms of dialogue with fellow students and the teacher that go beyond direct question-answer exchanges.

Tables VI.1, VI.2, and VI.3 list the frequency of observations for conceptual quality, instructional methods, and classroom climate on the basic and elaborate levels. When interpreting the figures, one must bear in mind that teachers were voluntary participants and that observations were announced ahead of time. Thus, this rough quantification does not show how teachers taught at the probationary schools, but what kinds of lessons the observed teachers presented to their outside visitors. In all likelihood, our selection procedure excluded the worst examples of incompetent teaching from our observation schedule.

Observation frequencies in Table VI.1 show that teachers for the most part conducted lessons on the basic level. The frequency of higher-order thinking, problem solving, and complex dialog among the counted snapshots is very low. Between 70 and 80 percent of the lessons did not show evidence of elaborate level teaching at all. Connections to students' experiences occurred more often, although over half of the lessons did not contain such an element of real life application. More complex instructional methods, such as group or partner work, were evident, though 60 percent of the lessons did not contain such formats at all. In sum, if performance-based pedagogy is the basis for student success on the state assessment (in this case the MSPAP), these lessons fell short for the most part. If students were exposed to such lessons throughout their school day – something we do not know since we do not have a representative sample – they would lack the opportunity of mastering the more complex tasks of the assessment.

Table VI.1 - Patterns of Instruction in Schools on Probation Elaborate Level
(Percent of Lessons)

	Evidence of Higher Order Thinking Skills	Problem Solving	Dialogue Complexity	Work in Teams	Real Life Application
4 or more snapshots	0	0	0	3	7
3 snapshots	3	0	0	7	0
2 snapshots	10	3	3	13	17
1 snapshot	20	10	13	17	23
Did not occur	67	87	84	60	53

On the basic level, lessons were more adequate. There was evidence of simple cognitive skills or content being learned in all lessons (Table VI.2). In half the lessons this took place throughout. But for about a fourth of the observed lessons, the conceptual base was very thin, i.e. evidence of content and skill learning was noted in fewer than three of the five observed snapshots per lesson.

Table VI.2 Patterns of Instruction in Schools on Probation – Basic Level
(Percent of Lessons)

Coherence of Lesson Plan	
Beginning, middle & end hang together	33
Common thread but breaks	47
Little coherence	20
Evidence of Simple Cognitive Skills	
4 or more snapshots	50
3 snapshots	27
2 snapshots	7
1 snapshot	16
Did not occur	0

Instructional Variety Within Lessons			
	Activities	Interactions	Materials
3 or more changes	77	33	47
At least 1 change	20	57	53
No variety	3	10	0

Evidence of Simple Test Taking Skills	
4 or more snapshots	0
3 snapshots	7
2 snapshots	10
1 snapshot	7
Did not occur	76

Lack of conceptual depth is also indicated by the large proportion of lessons that were not tightly held together by a common conceptual or topical threat. Only one third of all observed lessons were deemed highly coherent, i.e. beginning, middle, and end hung together. On the positive side, teachers seemed to be skillful instructors as far as methods are concerned. In the overwhelming majority of lessons, teachers used a variety of materials, activities, and forms of interaction, in quite a few lessons variety was a very prevalent feature. Interestingly, evidence of practicing simple test taking skills was fairly low; "drill and kill," as it is called by critics of test-driven instruction, was not observed at all in three fourths of the lessons. It is quite possible that the complexity of the MSPAP does not lend itself to the kind of narrowing of curriculum that has been found to accompany high-stakes testing based on basic skills tests (Darling-Hammond, 1991; Noble & Smith, 1994).

As for the overall climate of the classroom (Table VI.3), about half of the lessons received the summary rating of orderly. In about two-thirds of the lessons observers thought that at least three quarters of the students were involved. In a little over half of the observed lessons, students were described as "compliant." While only a very small percentage of lessons were observed during which students were "excited" about the content or the leaning, in about 40 percent of the lessons the raters judged that students were positively stimulated, showing interest, if not excitement. The tone in the lessons ranged from professional to disdainful.

Table VI.3 Patterns of Instruction in Schools on Probation - Basic Level
(Percent of Lessons)

Discipline		Motivation		Students on Task	
Orderly	50	Excited	13	Almost all	40
Occasional Disruptions	40	Interested	27	Three quarters	27
Frequent Disruptions	7	Compliant	53	Half	17
Out of Control	3	Resistant	0	One quarter	3
		Not Rated	7	Few	13

Tone (Percent in observations overall)	
Professional	53
Firm	40
Warm	33
Respectful	33
Irritated	16
Distant	13
Harried	13
Disdainful	3

In sum, the observed lessons exhibit a typical pattern. More complex forms of learning on the elaborate level were neglected. Many lessons lacked conceptual coherence, but learning on a basic conceptual level and instructional variety were widespread. Most lessons carried on in an orderly fashion or with occasional disruptions. The tone tended to be professional, and students, according to the raters, were either compliant or interested, in fairly equal proportions. Thus, conceptual depth and learning complexity were the most serious shortcomings, while instructional variety was a strong feature in the observed lessons.

A typical lesson at a middle school ran like this: as the students entered the classroom, they encountered a warm-up drill on the chalkboard or overhead projector. Eventually, as order was established and the teacher took roll or handed back papers, anywhere from a few students to the majority of them attempted the drill. Within five to ten minutes, the students were called to bring their attention to the teacher, and the teacher addressed the class. After a review of the warm up exercise, the teacher moved to the core topic. A teacher-centered lesson followed for a great deal of the class period. In some classes, students broke into groups to work on projects or activities. Individual seatwork was more typical. Sometimes the lesson ended with brief teacher-led summaries of the concepts covered during the class, a few with a reminders of upcoming work, and the rest simply ended when it is time for the students to change classes. The most prevalent pattern in elementary lessons was the use of "scripted" lessons. These lessons were taken directly from new programs, such as new reading series, that were mandated by the school district.

2. Conversations about Teaching and Accountability

So far, we have identified patterns of teaching in broad quantitative terms and illustrated these patterns with the description of typical lesson elements. We now examine whether there are interrelationships between patterns of teaching and ways of reflecting on practice and accountability. While each observed teacher was unique in many ways, certain patterns or types were discernible. We select eight cases of teachers that reveal these patterns most vividly. These cases are described in vignettes that weave together observation and interview data. Hence the vignettes describe teachers' responses to accountability in the context of their teaching practice. Two of the teachers described in the vignettes taught lessons classified as attempts to teach on an elaborate performance-based level; four are classified as solid on a basic level, and two as marginal. We also made an effort with these vignettes to capture the variety of teachers' reflective capacity and response to accountability.

Attempts at Performance-Based Instruction

Elaborate level lessons were the most difficult to detect in our sample. We observed five lessons that were attempts at this level. In elaborate level lessons we looked for a number of qualities: evidence of thinking skills above basic comprehension, open ended problem solving situations, efficient work in teams, connections to real life applications, challenging content, and complex dialogue. We observed lessons that struggled with these elements.

Two vignettes are presented here. One illustrates a lesson that is methodologically interesting but does not contain challenging difficulty of content. In the other, the teacher takes up the challenge of performance-based pedagogy guided by the official curriculum, but trivializes the constructivist nature of the exercise.

Ms. Knight

Ms. Knight, a teacher of English with thirty years experience, as a matter of routine, arranged her 26 eighth grade students into groups of four or five. The lesson we observed was on writing practice. The lesson began with a playful warm-up activity. During the lesson, each group was given an abstract nonsensical picture. In their groups students were asked to discuss their ideas about the pictures. After about ten minutes, a bell rang and the students stopped their group work. Ms. Knight explained that they were to move apart and write paragraphs expressing their ideas about the pictures. There were no right or wrong responses, said Ms. Knight, nor did the students have to base their writing solely on the ideas they discussed in their groups. For about fifteen minutes the students, almost without exception, wrote intently. As the students worked, Ms. Knight circulated around the room, giving encouragement to students to do their best work, and prodding students who needed a little push. In addition, she referred the students to the MSPAP writing rubric on the wall.

Following this seatwork, the students were brought together and individuals volunteered to present their paragraphs to the class. This kind of activity was evidently common for the students because they listened to each others' stories with attention and responded appropriately to attempts at humor. When the presentations were completed, Ms. Knight called for a volunteer to recap the lesson, while another collected the pictorial writing prompts. Before the students left, Ms. Knight handed out a homework assignment on creating a list as an organizational technique for writing. It was noteworthy that Ms. Knight did not have the students attempt to analyze or edit their writing. Nor was the rubric directly employed for actual writing instruction.

She commented on her lesson in the debriefing interview:

> That was just a normal thing we do sometimes. If you come in and they're sort of off the wall, I'll pull out a word search puzzle and then we'll have a teacher-student race and maybe give them a candy bar or something. Usually I win so, but they enjoy it and if, I look at it as being a form of thinking skills and that type of thing. They think of it as fun so I'm still teaching. In middle school, you never know when you're going to have to just forget what you planned to do and switch to something else and I guess being here so long, it's sort of rolls off my back. (A-24)

But her real objective for the lesson was the writing activity during which students were to "create from an abstract picture…create a picture in their mind and then put it in writing, construct meaning from one place to another." For her, this lesson piqued students' interest and pushed them to use their imaginations and think creatively.

She was pleased with the lesson. It had only been the second time that she had used these pictures and she thought that the students "did well" although they did not "include much of the colorfulness of the picture in their writing." She gauged the writing level of the students as "hopefully, eighth – it varies." The lesson's strong point in her mind was that she was able to coax students to get up in front of the class and present their writing products. While she felt good about her students' motivation she was less certain about the intellectual depth of the lesson: "I think they could've written more in depth, in fact I know they could. And then read the story early today."

As a remedy she proposed extending the time frame for the activity. Other than permitting the students more time to discuss the picture in their groups, Ms. Knight did not have suggestions for improving the lesson: "If I had probably done this with this particular group two days, let them look at the picture and discuss it yesterday and then write today, they probably would have gone more in depth."

In Ms. Knight's somewhat spontaneous, unregimented, and occasionally unplanned classroom environment which she characterized as "a strict, relaxed classroom," students usually worked, but some took liberties, and a few could be disruptive. Ms. Knight herself described her struggle with discipline this way:

> I'm not being, you know, putting them down, but they're hyper and I spent a lot of time getting them to settle down and [stop] jumping on each other, and you have to do this, "Alright let's stop here." Some days I have to threaten to give the whole class zero and then they'll cooperate…and some days I'll just walk out the room and then I'll come in and they look at me and [think] "Ms. Knight has really flipped this time." I don't say anything, I just walk out and I come in and they sit at their desks and they're, "Shhh, hush, hush, she's getting upset now. Be quiet." And there is this deathly

> silence and I can go on with my lesson. But they are, they're immature, they're not a moving group, they're just playful and just having fun. And some days I could come in here and just play with them all day long and not worry about it but then I say, "Wait a minute you're teaching and you have to do this." So I try to make it fun where they think they're really playing but they're [learning]. (A-24).

Ms. Knight believed that her lesson and the kind of writing activity it employed was very MSPAP-relevant. She assured us that writing for fluency in reference to the MSPAP rubric qualified this lesson as a "MSPAP lesson." It was noteworthy that Ms. Knight did not have the students attempt to analyze or edit their writing. Nor was the rubric directly employed for actual writing instruction. The observation took place two weeks before the test, so preparation for the test was intense: "Their homework is for MSPAP vocabulary. The closer we get the more intense it becomes but basically we try to incorporate MSPAP type activities from day one. And then the closer we get we just lay it on." For her preparing for MSPAP meant interspersing various activities into her regular curriculum with increasing intensity.

Probation, said Ms. Knight, helped her improve her teaching by tightening up her classroom:

> We are now held to certain standards and expectations such as we have expectations for the students, the principal has some and administration has expectations for us and she checks to make sure that these things are being done. With [the principal] we hear about it and that's the way I think it should be. And in the past we've more or less been left to do to our own task and like I used to be guilty of not writing lesson plans. I'd come in, I knew what I wanted to teach....And I sort of dragged my feet this year but I know now she's called us in several times you know in staff meetings and you must write your lesson plans, so I have a stack of them over there on my desk. (A-24)

But at the same time, writing out lesson plans had little impact in her classroom. In her mind, her teaching style and the stock of lessons from which she drew did not change even though accountability had increased her principal's classroom supervision:

> Really, the only thing I do differently now is write out and sometimes I talk so much and if I am going to be out which I try not to, I promise I'll write a substitute lesson, say this, say that, do this, do that, you know like the substitute doesn't have a brain in his or her head, that's when I'm writing, that's the way I write it out....But other than that, there's nothing I didn't do that I've changed. I still have my objectives, my outcomes, my warm-ups....That was all there before. (A-24)

Ms. Knight accepted the Maryland accountability system and wholeheartedly supported attempts to raise the test scores in her school. When we asked her what the chances were for the school's success on MSPAP that year she replied, "I'm hoping, because we really put a lot of effort in this, that we will see an increase." For her, the observed lesson was performance-based, MSPAP adequate, and a regular occurrence in her class. The activity "was just a normal thing we do sometimes...I look at it as being a form of thinking skills. They think of it as fun."

However, she was concerned that her schools' and her own efforts might not be recognized by the accountability agency in light of the obstacles that the teachers in the school had to overcome to reach their students.

> They [the state] have not been in to see and learn what we're doing... You know, we have students who come in here with a lot of baggage, some of it we have not gotten through yet. But yet we're expected to prepare them to make these wonderful scores on tests and I think we're just not equipped no matter how unique plans we have in place, and we have some darn good plans in place and they are in force this year. But we have to weigh them from outside. We have broken homes....Our kids are bringing this and we have a lot to, you know, push out of the way. (A-24)

Ms. Peyton

Ms. Peyton, a middle aged African American teacher, taught math for 15 out of her 25 years in the classroom. She was, however, teaching the observed lesson for the first time. It came from one of the six mathematics series that was piloted in the school that year. Ms. Peyton taught it as instructed in the teachers' manual.

At the beginning of the class the 18 eighth grade students present were directed to do a short warm-up drill consisting of rounding numbers and computation. This was not directly related to the lesson we observed, but beginning the lesson with a warm-up was an established part of the daily routine. When the students finished, they split into the work groups that had been established two days earlier and resumed measuring the circumference and diameter of different sized circular objects. Ms. Peyton gave no review of the previous two days nor did she give an introduction to the present task. As students measured, they recorded their data on graphs for subsequent analysis. It took the entire period for the students to complete their measuring and graphing. Throughout the lesson, Ms. Peyton moved about the room, consulting with students, and monitoring their progress. Towards the end of the period, she instructed her students to stop what they were doing and proceeded to give an explanation of the relationship between circumference and diameter. Her last announcement of the class period was, "There is a relationship and it is pi." (Field notes, G-16).

In the debriefing, Ms. Peyton told us that creating situations that primed students to make meaning out of abstract concepts was more time consuming than she was accustomed to. She thought this lesson would take two class periods, but it had already consumed a third. She lamented, "I think that they should get this far and I wind up only getting so far and then I want to finish whatever I'm doing." Time management was a troublesome factor in Ms. Peyton's struggle with the new pedagogy. In previous years she taught lessons strictly on a basic level. "I'm a math teacher," she said, "I'm used to, you know, this is this and this is this..." But this lesson was more "MSPAP-like." Her objective was "...to try and get them to be responsible in groups, so when they do the MSPAP they can sort of stay focused. And we've done measurements before like that but never having them link them together and find the relationship." Ms. Peyton, however, did not mention in her reflection of the lesson that she was the one who had explained the relationship; her students did not find it. What counted for Ms. Peyton was that students had the opportunity to work in groups and be involved in an activity, constructing the concept did not seem a major concern.

Ms. Peyton was open to trying new ways of teaching that were, in her eyes, aligned with MSPAP. She sounded excited about trying out new methods. Her view of the textbook, the source of the observed lesson, was very positive:

> I love the book. I like the way they have it set up because in the teacher's manual that they have they match the skills in the book. First of all, it's set up by themes and they match the skills that are in that theme with the national standards. So it really is very close because I know the MSPAP is taken from the state standards that they get from the national standards. (G-16)

Ms. Peyton believed the use of this textbook was a step on the road to improved MSPAP scores. "I know this approach in this book is what [the school district] would like to go to because I know this is closer to what the standards are and closer to what will help the children, I think, pass the MSPAP," she said. And although everyone, in Ms. Peyton's perspective, was working toward that goal, she doubted that the students would be passing the test any time soon: "Some of the things are in place, but the children are not quite there yet." For Ms. Peyton, she was helping to close the gap by teaching the new curriculum and using the new materials. She trusted those that made decisions on curricula, textbooks, and programs to provide her with the right kind of materials. For her, the challenge in adopting the new curriculum in her class was one of management and activities, less one of concepts.

As our conversation continued, frustration replaced Ms. Peyton's excitement as she talked about administrative processes she was to follow due to the school's probationary status. For example, teachers were to keep portfolios on their students. They were also required to meet in teams three times a week which, for Ms. Peyton, occurred during her daily planning period because of scheduling difficulties. These demands came at an emotional cost to her, and she expressed feeling demoralized and frustrated:

> The accountability is more like treating you more like a child... I can understand how it is, and I can go along with it, but it certainly doesn't make me feel good about the fact that I have to do this... So, I see it as the work doubling, and there are more things that we have to do and some of them I don't understand as to why it has to be that way....I find it to be a little more frustrating as far as I am concerned and I think as far as the experienced teachers are concerned. And we do it, I mean, you know, they say "this" and we do it. The morale doesn't work very well...The situation is more strained and you feel it's more like, you feel like, if you don't do the right thing, then you're going to be punished. (G-16)

Basic Level Lessons

The majority of the lessons in our study were taught at a basic level. Solid basic level lessons were conceptually coherent and were aimed at developing simple cognitive skills. The teachers used a variety of materials, activities, and interactions with students. Through the instruction, students responded in ways that indicated understanding of the concepts under investigation. In some cases, basic level lessons were marginal. In those, instruction lacked variety of methods or students appeared confused by the lesson. Student participation was low and the teacher did not try to motivate students to take part.

The first three vignettes that follow describe solid basic level lessons, and the remaining two, marginal lessons.

Ms. Hillman

Ms. Hillman, a young African American woman who was in her third year at her school, taught a seventh grade math lesson on the prime factorization of composite numbers. She began the lesson with a warm-up drill that reviewed the rules of divisibility for the numbers 1 through 10 with special attention to 3 and 4. Unlike many other observed lessons, the content of the warm up, the divisibility rules, were taken up again later in the lesson. A skilled classroom manager with nine years of teaching experience, Ms. Hillman used her time efficiently, listing vocabulary relevant to the lesson on the chalkboard while the students completed their drill. As the students finished the drill, they were directed to copy the vocabulary words into their notebooks. Meanwhile, the teacher passed out calculators to the students. The quick steady pace of the lesson compelled almost all of the students to stay on task and most were able to complete the warm up drill and vocabulary task by the time Ms. Hillman called upon the class to give her their attention.

Ms. Hillman drew two factor trees for a composite number on the chalkboard. While she did this she incorporated the vocabulary words the students copied from the board into her brief lecture. She spent a few minutes asking direct questions about factoring and called for volunteers to come to the board to create trees for two different numbers. While the volunteers were at the board, Ms. Hillman prompted the seated students to make observations about the examples being demonstrated. The rules of divisibility from the warm up were brought up and when the teacher was satisfied that the students understood the concept of factorization, she assigned problems from the textbook for students to do individually at their seats. The students worked quietly for another 15 minutes. With five minutes remaining in the period, those who were not finished were instructed to complete the problems for homework. Then Ms. Hillman asked several students to make verbal summations of the work they had done that day. She stressed important points made by one of the students and handed out additional homework before the students left the room.

Ms. Hillman explained to us that she planned her lessons throughout the school year around a combination of county curricular requirements and the state assessments, the Maryland Functional Test (MFT) and the MSPAP. MFT skills were practiced twice a week. She noted a distinction between test preparation lessons and "regular" curriculum specific lessons. "If it's not Maryland Functional or MSPAP related – because we do have tasks that we can pull in – skill related that's performance tasks, I pull those in. But if it's just a regular lesson, no MSPAP, no Functional per se, then I rely on the book" (B-17). She acknowledged that the lesson we observed was taught on a basic level and did not contain the components of a performance-based lesson:

> Well, nothing was performance-based. Today's lesson was more of a Functional skill than a MSPAP skill. They didn't really have a task, you know, cooperative – MSPAP is cooperative. And it was nothing today that really, you know, relied on a cooperative style. So, it was more a Functional than a MSPAP today. (B-17)

For Ms. Hillman, each test represented a particular activity format. She identified the MSPAP with cooperative group work.

The observed lesson was tight and, from our point of view, effective. Ms Hillman reflected on her lesson this way:

> Well, I think they knew what the objective was. I think they knew what I expected them to be able to do at the end of the class, and like I said, I think most of them did that. I did have a few students...who it does take longer for them to grasp the concept, that were a little lost. (B-17)

Ms. Hillman was less satisfied with other aspects of her students' performance:

> I think they should have done better...Knowing what they actually did, I think it is always a problem for them to be able to reflect orally, "Okay, what did I just do?"...I do the closure thing every day, and it takes on a variety of different styles. But that one that I always like to [do]: "Okay, now what did you do? I know what I wanted you to do, but do you know?' That always falls short for me. (B-17)

For Ms. Hillman, practicing meta-cognition was a teaching challenge for which she took personal responsibility even though she admitted having difficulties with it at times. She keenly observed her students and analyzed their understandings. She believed it was her duty to raise student achievement even though she was aware that many of her students were not working at the cognitive level needed to meet the achievement expectations of the accountability system. She welcomed visitors in her classroom and did not mind the principal's regular check-ups, for she was eager to learn, as she explained. She embraced the state's quest for higher test scores and was willing to shape her instruction to the various tests, but in the tangle between high performance expectations of the state and the reality of her students' skills, her teaching was firmly anchored in her students' needs.

> *Interviewer: The gap between what the state expects the students to know and what the school has actually shown in terms of scores is very, very wide. How do you deal with that as a teacher?*

> *Ms. Hillman*: Well, one day at a time, basically. I know that the gap cannot be tightened within a, you know, short period of time…And one class at a time as well, because a lot of times, what I have planned cannot be done for each class. So, I have to modify, and for what *that* class, where *that* class is, as far as their level. So, I'm thinking, just, basically, go where the students are, and bring them up…I think start where they are, and then bring them up, and in time, if instruction is, if you're doing what you're supposed to do, then the scores will come up. (B-17)

Mr. Warner

Mr. Warner is an African American science teacher in his mid forties who came to teaching after having been in the military and running a business. The physical order of his classroom demonstrated his habit of approaching school life in a self described business-like manner. The classroom exuded order. Behavioral expectations were prominently displayed on posters around the room, and it was apparent by the respectful and attentive behavior of his eighth grade students that they had assimilated the posted directives well.

We observed Mr. Warner teach a lesson on different forms of energy (mechanical, chemical, etc.) and the relationship between potential and kinetic energy. The lesson began with a routine warm up that was on the blackboard when the students entered the room. They were to write down one form of energy and list situations in which it was converted from one form to another. When the students completed their lists, several were called to the front of the room to present their work. The students were enthusiastic about participating and there were many volunteers.

The lesson then moved into an examination of seven types of energy. The class read silently while one student read aloud from the textbook she was sharing. (There were not enough books for every student.) Mr. Warner stopped the reading repeatedly to ask students to give real life examples of the energy conversions that were presented in the text, and they actively competed for the opportunity to supply answers. The concepts that Mr. Warner wanted reinforced were repeated several times, in the text that was read and in his questions. The lesson proceeded in this manner for about a half an hour and ended with Mr. Warner's summation of the various forms of energy that were discussed in the class.

Mr. Warner was very firm on the right way to teach the curriculum. He did not use the prescribed instructional program because "they don't break the concepts down the way I want them to be broken down." In reference to the adopted textbook he said, "I do a lot of work from other texts, and I use that [the adopted text] as the guidelines, since that is the text the county prescribes for us."

Describing his orderly and deliberate teaching style, Mr. Warner explained his use of alternative reading material:

> *Mr. Warner*: The concept development, the vocabulary development wouldn't have been as well [in the adopted text] because this particular book uses a lot of program strategies where it'll teach a concept and then it will repeat the concept again,
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah, I noticed.*
>
> *Mr. Warner*: to make sure that the student gets the concept, and I find that *very* effective.
>
> *Interviewer: It was very repetitive, but I agree with you.*
>
> *Mr. Warner*: It's very effective though. If a certain student's not getting that concept, that same concept is repeated for that student again. And then I can, I do a lot of probing. I'm proactive, because – I never sit down during the day and I'm always circulating around. The way you see my classroom set up is the way it's set up from day one. I have it set up for cooperative learning. So, the kids are pretty confident with this, and I'm confident with it, because I can manage it. (A-25)

Though there was no indication of a cooperative learning set up in the observed lesson, Mr. Warner said he employed a considerable repertoire of teaching techniques. "I use different types of teaching strategies. I use a lot of experiential learning with the class and they tend to relate well to that." The lesson we observed, however, was very traditional. It was to prepare the students for an experiential lesson. He gave us a preview, "We'll probably do a sit-down tug-of-war where weight won't be a factor, and basically it will be power and strength. So that will be chemical energy and mechanical energy." Then he described why the lesson we observed was useful as a lead into the laboratory experience:

> When a student can apply any particular concept, they can scaffold on from concepts that they've learned previously. Then they can identify with what you're teaching. If they can't internalize the concept, then it doesn't mean anything to them....I was trying to have them identify with some real-life situations that they deal with everyday. Not only that, these are some different situations they've dealt with in my classroom, in the laboratory. And if they can reflect on some of those activities, then they can, you know, actually incorporate [them] into their schema. (A-25)

Mr. Warner was very open in relating his beliefs about teaching and learning, but his concern for the state's accountability system appeared to be absent. We pressed him to tell us how his lesson prepared students for the MSPAP, but his responses were evasive. He was doing what he thought was working best with his students, and he felt he was successful. Indeed, the observers noted an effective, if at times monotonous, lesson and busy students. Nonetheless, adopted curricula, accountability goals and pressures faded into the background. He put it this way: "I would say that I'm somewhat of a risk-taker and I'm always proactive towards the students. I'm always looking for avenues that will make my lessons more interesting, more expeditionary, and more experiential....I'm one that teaches a lesson." (A-25)

Ms. Clement

Ms. Clement taught mathematics in the same school as Mr. Warner, and like him, she was the same age, an African American with roots in her students' community, and with 24 years of teaching experience, seasoned in her career. Like Mr. Warner's classroom, Ms. Clement's classroom was very organized and students were very disciplined when they came to her room. But unlike Mr. Warner, she was outspoken about accountability and very well connected in the school. As a former union representative in the school for five years, she was an unofficial teacher leader at her site. She characterized her classroom with these words:

> I'm borderline regimented, because I say, I run this classroom as a work station. It's a work cycle. I'm the supervisor, ok? Let's face it, schools are a business...I'm, "What's the work plan here?" It's the written curriculum. That's what I'm paid to deliver, and I insist on doing that. (A-22)

Not unlike her colleague, Mr. Warner, she developed a structure that worked for her and her students:

> I don't change it. I think back to what increases my students' comfort level. No matter what happens, I don't change, and they depend on it. That's important to them. It's also a part of classroom climate. My expectations don't change for them. They know what to expect. (A-22)

We observed Ms. Clement teaching a very traditional, basic skills oriented math lesson to an eighth grade "resource room" class. It began with warm-up computation problems that students copied from the board. After about 10 minutes, Ms. Clement went over the problems even though the students were not done with their work. After showing them how to get the "right" answers, Ms. Clement instructed the students to turn to their books and began demonstrating ways to use the distributive property to solve equations. Ms. Clement gave the students a problem to try. After correcting it, she gave the students an assignment from the book and they began working. All work throughout the class was done individually by the students. After a few minutes, Ms. Clement noted that the students were making a lot of mistakes so she called the class to attention and demonstrated a few more problems. The teacher modeling/student practicing process proceeded as she assigned another set of problems from the text. After the lesson she commented:

> Well, I certainly realized that this class was, and more importantly that a lot of these students had missed, when I first started, talking about the different properties, ok? So, they were two days behind, so I kind of went back, because I thought, I thought they were ready for a distributive problem. So, a lot of times, if I start a lesson, and I find that they aren't grasping, and I don't see the kind of comfort level I need to see, then I will go back. You know, I stop and go back, and try to bring in prior knowledge... because I find that with this group, you know, they're really short-term memory. You know, it's here today and it's gone tomorrow, if not this afternoon. (A-22)

Order, routine, clear expectations, and adapting lesson difficulty to the comfort level of the students were the ingredients of her perceived effectiveness. When asked if she would teach the lesson again in the same way she replied:

> I will probably...pretty much the same, pretty much the same, because I noticed at the end of the lesson, except for some of them, that it was beginning to click. Yeah. For some of them it was beginning to click. Often, I will go back using prior knowledge. Just as I talked about variables the numbers having, like 11D plus 5D, they have the same last name...I do that when I teach fractions. ...So, it's pretty much similar to fractions, adding like terms...It's because when I teach fractions, I talk about the numerators, the first name, the last name, and let's say they're adding one fourth and one third, they have different last names, fourths and thirds. We need to find a common last name for them....So, a lot of times, I'm reading faces, and as I walk around and I look, and pretty much

> my students know this is a no-risk class. Failure is not fatal here. Nobody takes your birthday if you get the wrong answer. So, I like my children to feel comfortable, and raise your hand, even if you get the wrong answers. (A-22)

In the debriefing interview, Ms. Clement proudly presented her students' latest scores on the Maryland Functional Test for which she had practiced with them intensely. When we asked her whether she had changed anything in her lessons since the onset of the MSPAP, she replied:

> I am still not sold on the MSPAP....I think for some students, it's great. But we're not going to get all students at the same place at the same time, and that's what the MSPAP attempts to do. It will never happen. I love the challenges, and I like the group activities, because students certainly need to learn how to work cooperatively. The only good thing about it is, what I see happen is, when we have the MSPAP, our groups are mixed, so we get the top with the bottom. And it's a very interesting mix....And I like that. I like the group. We only do that when we do MSPAP. (A-22)

Ms. Clement did not reject the MSPAP entirely, but she was largely unaffected by it. She felt she had developed a style that worked, and for her this meant an emphasis on basic skill development adapted to students' comprehension level. As a result, probation had little impact on her classroom. Asked if she had changed her instruction since probation, she answered:

> No. I really don't, because the status of the school just put us on alert. But it didn't change...you know, I have always felt that I've always been a committed teacher. ...So, nothing really changed. My expectations certainly never changed. I have certainly been receptive to the information and the different....sometimes we're given things from the math department that we all have to do, that the math department has to do. And regardless to how I feel about the MSPAP, my personal feelings, I don't bring that into my classroom. (A-22)

But in her characteristic outspokenness she confided that ever since the school had become reconstitution-eligible she felt under all kinds of conflicting pressures to rearrange instructional time and to cut back on basic skills development which in her judgment was essential for her students. Two different types of tests, a district curriculum insufficiently aligned yet made absolutely mandatory, external monitors with specific expectations, a school administration veering between compliance and the school's self-interests, district and school subject matter departments at odds with each other, and lastly the perceived learning needs of the students at odds with performance demands of the system – these were the cross-currents in which Ms. Clement upheld the structure of her classroom. The following excerpts from our interview with her reveal the enormity and scope of the strain the accountability system put on Ms. Clement's practice.

> *Ms. Clement:* Actually what's going on in our [district] area, the chairman of the math department, supervisor of the math department has just been relieved from her position, so from the top I don't know what's going on. ...Now as far as math, and this is interesting. I have to throw this in. We have the Maryland Functional Math test which was just given last Wednesday. Prior to this year, we have always been allowed to pretty much, almost in isolation, teach the Maryland Functional skill to our students because eighth grade curriculum is statistics. But I can cover what needs to be covered in about three to four weeks adequately for what's covered for that particular quarter for statistics....But we were told we have to dive into our curriculum, okay, because we had state people coming in and out of the building and they're going to be looking for certain things and they need to come in and find us working on a curriculum. Now I, on the other hand, know that if we are reconstitution-eligible, somebody's also going to be looking at our scores. I also know that when those test scores come back, I have the accountability for how many of my students pass that Maryland Functional Math test which is a requirement for graduation. So, to me, it was not mathematically sound or educationally sound as a whole for me to teach histograms, modes, scatter plots, line plot graphs, and it's not covered on the [MFT] test. Now, this is what we were told by the master teacher: "Go into the curriculum because those skills will be covered in the curriculum. If you follow the curriculum, the scope and sequence, those skills will be covered." No such thing. Not for eighth grade....The scope and sequence which is supposed to be visible on our desk at all times...
>
> *Interviewer: ...does not cover the functional test?*
>
> *Ms. Clement:* No, absolutely not. Now the only thing that's in there, okay, I could do some adding and subtracting of whole numbers. I could

have done some averaging, but there would have been no opportunities for multiplying fractions or adding fractions or substituting numbers. It was just not there. Now, I taught those anyway. I just decided, if someone comes in, and they want to address it, including [the principal] herself, then I was going to present my position to her. Now, what's interesting enough was, this man who was our school improvement person and I talked at length about this, and I told him exactly what I was doing, he was in agreement with me. About two weeks before the test, we get this notice that came down saying that we were to start incorporating the math, that we had certain days that we were to do Functional. Two weeks before the test!...We did. So it will be interesting to see what our scores look like.

Interviewer: I see. Now aren't those kinds of decisions made in the math department meetings?

Ms. Clement: Well, that's what's really interesting because the supervisor in math was dismissed from her position because there were so many discrepancies in the math department and I understand and I agree with her. The math department tells us one thing, then an administrator tells us something else, so whose directions are you to follow? And that is always the big discussion in our math meeting. We are told to dive into the curriculum, to do this and then you have principals on the other hand who are saying, "No, those skills are to be taught in isolation." And I agree with those administrators who step out there and say, "Hey, go ahead and teach it. It's just until October." And I don't have to tell you that often even two months is not enough time. Many of those math skills that I am supposed to review, I have to actually introduce. And needless to say, those that are supposed to be mastered are far from that.

Interviewer: So traditionally you would spend from September to the MFT date on the skills that are on the test?

Ms. Clement: Just on the skills that are covered on the functional test.

Interviewer: How important is it for you that the school scores high on the MSPAP?

Ms. Clement: For me? I don't know if you want this on tape but I have a sticker on my car that says, "Stop MSPAP, teach basics."

Interviewer: Oh really. Tell me about it.

Ms. Clement: You know why? Because I think MSPAP is a good concept. I love the performance assessment activities but I think that they would be better geared, the test for our students who are more academically challenged, inclined, but for my students who are still stuck

> on the basics, I say this: I have a problem with trying to teach the Pythagorean theorem to students who can't do basic computation. So a lot of times we're, the kids are tested on things that haven't even been introduced to them or that they don't have the basics, they don't have the groundwork for. So I'm just not sure if MSPAP is for all of our students.
>
> *Interviewer: Are you saying it's too difficult?*
>
> *Ms. Clement:* I don't think it's too difficult for all of our students. For some of our students it's perfect and they love it. I don't think all of our students should have to do it....Because everything else is tailored according to child's ability and then everybody else is expected to perform the same on the MSPAP and there's something wrong with that line of thinking to me...Well, I look at this school for example. This year we don't even have an algebra class....So, if we're only giving our students middle grade mathematics without going into the algebra area and then we give them things to do such as the MSPAP activities, to me it's too big of a gap....It's too big of a gap. We need to do some other things to bridge those gaps. And I don't have to tell you our kids are usually just frustrated by...by the test, okay? And the way it's set up. They give you all of these activities and at the end the students have to write. A lot of times they don't even get there, to the writing part, which is the most important part because that's what they're going to score them on. (A-22)

Ms. Seegars

Reading proficiency is a priority in the primary grades. In one of the elementary schools, the *Open Court* reading series had recently been implemented to raise reading achievement. The lesson described here was taught by first grade teacher, Ms. Seegars, a European-American woman in her late thirties, who had been in the school for nine years. She was originally hired as the technology specialist at the school, but because of staffing problems mid-year, she was placed in this first grade classroom.

When we entered Ms. Seegars's room the students were seated on the floor in a cluster reviewing the previous day's lesson. After a few minutes, they moved into a circle and began playing a game designed to help them practice the aural identification of long and short vowel sounds. A plastic disk was tossed into the air; one side of the disk said "short", the other side, "long," and the students were to state a word containing a letter that corresponded to the side that landed up. After about ten minutes, the students moved into another arrangement for a new activity. Ms. Seegars showed the students a card with a word or a sound blend on it and the students chorused the word or blend aloud. The teacher then wrote the word on the chalkboard and the students were directed to chorus it again. For some words, Ms. Seegars called on individuals to define them. The students then returned to their seats where they were directed to begin a handwriting activity. They practiced writing words in their workbooks for about ten minutes while the teacher and the teacher's aide monitored the legibility and the spacing of the students' letters and words. The lesson ended with a story circle. The story was one introduced the day before and Ms. Seegar asked the students to recall what they remembered about the story. Then the teacher modeled silent reading for the students by reading a few lines quietly to herself, using her finger to track the words as she read. She then read the story aloud and led a short discussion about the rhyming words embedded in the text.

Nothing about this lesson was of Ms. Seegars's own design. It was coherent, sequential, and contained a variety of activities, interactions, and materials. Ms. Seegars's professional manner, firm tone, and steady pacing created an orderly climate in which almost all of the students displayed interest throughout the duration of our observation. In Ms. Seegars's view, the *Open Court* series encouraged this kind of teaching. "I'm very comfortable with the program," she commented. "It's a very typical lesson – it's scripted – it goes top to bottom. You just read the next thing on the page and go along and do it. …It takes the burden off of me."

Ms. Seegars described how *Open Court* representatives came into her classroom with a checklist, "to make sure you're doing everything you're supposed to do." She accepted these observations as a component of her professional development, but noted that strict adherence to the program resulted in a lack of flexibility that made it difficult to teach an entire lesson in the language arts period of the day. Ms. Seegars said she got around this by stealing time from other subject areas: "...when I go back after lunch, even though I'm not supposed to, I have to finish up my *Open Court*. But I like it so much that I'm willing to sacrifice a little time out of everything else." Acknowledging that this attention to reading skills cuts into time for activities that helped students develop abilities such as "classifying, analyzing and checking for errors," Ms. Seegars assured us that if her students were ever going to be successful on the MSPAP, "...they have to be able to read the test. So that's my main focus now because I think we were losing a little sight of the fact, that is, they have to read."

Ms. Seegars did not feel undue pressure as a result of teaching in a reconstitution eligible school. As she stated, her main concern was to teach her students to read, and she blamed the whole language program that was previously used at the school for the poor reading skills and low test scores of the school's older students, notwithstanding the fact that several years earlier when "whole language" programs were in use the school's MSPAP scores were considerably higher. For her, the new program would surely do the job of bridging the gap between her students' performance and the expectations of the accountability system. We asked her if *Open Court* might help the school's low performance on the test:

> I think so easily. Because the kids will be able to read the material...When I was teaching third grade we went as a group to [the

> principal] and said they would fail....I guarantee they're going to see more slides [in test scores] until we see these children on *Open Court* and then they'll start to see the test scores come up (E-15).

Marginal Lessons

Mr. Carrothers

Mr. Carrothers was in his third year of teaching, his first as a middle school language arts teacher. His seventh and eighth grade students took their time entering his classroom. Many were late, not arriving until five minutes after the start of class. The usual warm-up drill was waiting for them on the chalkboard, but most sat down and immediately began conversing with their friends. One or two slumped down in their seats or put their heads on their desks to catch a few winks. Mr. Carrothers was called into the hall by another teacher. Upon his harried return, now a full 10 minutes into the class, he called the students to attention and began the day's lesson on the classification of verbs. The objective was to distinguish between verbs of being, visible actions verbs, and verbs that represented mental action. Mr. Carrothers appeared to be having difficulty organizing his presentation. He gave several examples of verbs in the different classifications, but his students – the few who were paying attention – looked puzzled and confused by what he was telling them. One student challenged contradictory examples of verbs of being, effectively sidetracking his teacher for several minutes. While Mr. Carrothers attempted to instruct the individual student in the correct use of the verb form, the other students either began or continued side conversations.

The class was called to attention again and given an assignment to do. The students were told to copy five sentences that Mr. Carrothers had written on the chalkboard prior to class. They were to identify and classify the verbs in each one.

Again Mr. Carrothers's instructions were unclear and the students who intended on doing the assignment debated about what it was they were supposed to do. The rest continued their conversations, returned their heads to their desks, or did something altogether unrelated to the assignment.

When we interviewed Mr. Carrothers, he explained his objective for the lesson and what he believed it achieved.

> I wanted them to be able to identify a verb...the predicate verb within a sentence, and then after being able to identify the predicate verb to be able to tell me whether or not it's an action verb or a state of being verb. They were able to identify the verb for the most part. Sometimes, some of them weren't, but I would say maybe about 60 percent of them were able to identify it at least four out of five times. (G-21)

Our observations had indicated fewer students participating. In fact, we had seen only a few students on task. Upon our probing, he commented:

> *Interviewer: I see twenty percent of these kids are really in tune and really trying to figure out what [the teacher's] teaching, but I see (Mr. Carrothers interrupts.)*
>
> *Mr. Carrothers*: You know it's interesting because one of the things that I do, that I learned through "methods of teaching," was that to maximize student learning you want to split the students up into students who are motivated in learning...put them with other students who may be a little less motivated or don't understand as much....I think that the whole concept of cooperative learning and collaborative learning is set up for the ideal environment, and it doesn't take into account for when a majority of students are bringing things from outside of the school that impact upon their learning - that is - has a negative effect on the quality. (G-21)

Mr. Carrothers assured us that "I can be rather creative when I'm in the right environment," but there were many factors, in his eyes, that were working against his creative potential. As a relatively inexperienced teacher in a new school, he received little support. On his first day of school, his orientation to the school consisted only of being shown to his room and given a set of books. We asked him to describe what kind of help he received. "None. None." he said, "We're talking professionally, none. Deal with it....There's no formal system of mentoring."

Exacerbating the problem was the overwhelming amount of documentation teachers had to keep on students as a part of the accountability system of the school. "We have to document everything that we do. Nobody ever reads the documentation...But we have to document this, we have to document that....We spend so much time documenting that now time is taken away from my lesson plan" (G-21). He then continued complaining about parents, school discipline, and his students' low preparedness.

> *Interviewer: Reconstitution eligibility has a relationship to MSPAP scores....Is there a relationship between what you were doing [in today's lesson] and what they're going to be tested [on]?*
>
> *Mr. Carrothers*: I have been trying higher level thinking skills, analysis, sentences evaluation. These are higher level thinking skills but if we haven't...gotten a knowledge base yet, I can't go to the higher level thinking skills. MSPAP is designed to test the student, or it is designed through higher level thinking skills – seeing what their higher level thinking skills are. But they don't have a knowledge base yet. So at some point I've got to say, "You know what? Your MSPAP is nice but they need a knowledge base." (G-21)

Mr. Carrothers had learned the difference between teacher-centered and performance-based activities from an education course he took; and because "we're told about MSPAP all the time," he knew that MSPAP was a performance-based assessment. Mr. Carrothers excused himself from using performance-based activities because "performance-based activities on the whole are very, very difficult to continually score, especially when you're overwhelmed with paper work because it takes time – it takes time." Mr. Carrothers was clearly frustrated and perhaps even angry with his situation.

When asked whether the reconstitution eligibility status of the school or the MSPAP influenced his teaching, he replied, "Is MSPAP driving what we're doing in any way? No. No. What's driving what we're doing is survival" (G-21).

Mr. Sinclair

In our final vignette we enter the third grade classroom of Mr. Sinclair. Mr. Sinclair, a young white teacher from Texas, entered the teaching profession through the *Teach for America* program. He was in his second of the two years of his teaching obligation.

Mr. Sinclair's math lesson was intended to demonstrate how people use fractional units in their everyday lives. This was accomplished by taking the students on an imaginary trip to the grocery store. Mr. Sinclair explained that the change students received at the store could be thought of as a fraction of a dollar. After the pretend shopping trip, the students completed a worksheet titled "A Trip to Safeway" that directed them to add up four dollar amounts in decimal form and then fill in a blank check using the sum of the amounts.

It took about 20 minutes for the class to complete the worksheet. Most of this time was spent on writing the check. The students were quite curious about the different aspects of the check, particularly the check number at the top right hand corner. Mr. Sinclair tried to explain that bank patrons received books of checks and that the checks were numbered sequentially. This was very difficult for the students to understand, and Mr. Sinclair had difficulty getting the students to focus on adding the dollar amounts and writing the check.

Up until this point, all the work the students had done dealt with dollar amounts in decimal form. The class slowly progressed to filling in the part of the check where the dollar amount was to be written out in words with the cents in fraction form. "How can money be thought of as a fraction?" Mr. Sinclair asked. He was faced by blank stares. Restating the question did not lift students' confusion. After a few moments a few students attempted to answer. Their answers made no sense. Mr. Sinclair again stated that cents could be thought of as fractions. More confusion ensued and the students became restless. Now Mr. Sinclair was frustrated and frustration turned into irritation. Eventually he dismissed the question and moved on to the correction of the work students had done on the worksheet. By this time, 40 minutes of class time had elapsed and it was time for a bathroom break. To bring the lesson to some kind of closure, Mr. Sinclair quickly recapitulated the answers to the problems on the worksheet. As the students were dismissed to the restroom in small groups, Mr. Sinclair asked them what they had learned today. One student answered that people can change the numbers on the check to increase the amount (F-20, Field notes).

In the debriefing, Mr. Sinclair spoke at length about the mathematics in the lesson, which, from our perspective played second fiddle to the attention spent on the check writing activity. He explained how he had the students set up the addition problem based on items they chose from their shopping trip.

> *Mr. Sinclair*: I think today I went through more step-by-step than I usually do. Usually we talk about the topic before and then go through, or then I have the students go through the directions or read the directions. Today I think what we did was we took it much more linearly. We looked at one problem. We talked about that problem. They did it.
>
> *Interviewer: Then you moved into the check writing?*

> *Mr. Sinclair*: And that, we've never done anything like that before, so I wanted to make it as cut and dry, step-by-step, so the kids could follow along with what we were doing. They seemed to be pretty interested, much more interested than I thought they'd be actually.
>
> *Interviewer: Do you think any part of that went by them?*
>
> *Mr. Sinclair*: I still don't think that a lot of the kids, I don't think that we focused enough on using the fractions – using the money as fractions....In the end they still didn't exactly, they weren't, they didn't understand well enough to be able to explain how money can be converted to fractions. (F-20)

As we discussed the difficulty his students had grasping the lesson's main conceptual focus, Mr. Sinclair confessed that when he asked the question on how money could be thought of as a fraction: "I was a bit confused at that point too." The decimal conversion question came "straight out of the curriculum," so it didn't occur to him how difficult the concept was for third graders. He was unaccustomed to questioning the curriculum because he trusted it to be conceptually coherent and grade-level appropriate.

> I had gone through the curriculum, looking at this lesson, and I don't know if you've ever seen the [county] curriculum, it's not complicated at all... And one of the questions with a certain task was how can money be thought of as a fraction – and having put that in there, thinking about that, is an incredibly open and incredibly confusing question, especially [because] we never even touched how can it be thought of, you know? Wow..." (F-20).

Mr. Sinclair told us that only half of his students were on a third grade level, but he nonetheless used the third grade curriculum as directed. We asked him if he made modifications for the students that were below grade level.

> *Interviewer: How much freedom do you have in changing that curriculum to meet the needs of that half of the group in your class that isn't on grade level, like pulling out second grade books?*
>
> *Mr. Sinclair*: It's interesting. I mean I guess I could. I don't have direct access to second grade books or anything in here....I guess I could have freedom to go and get those books and bring them in here although we as

> teachers are expected to have these certain things covered by the end of the year. And having it broken down on a day by day fashion lays out what we need to have done, and the scope and sequence kind of fashion. (F-20)

Given his acknowledgment that he was not addressing the problem that many of his students were below grade level, we asked him if the MSPAP scores the state expected for his students were attainable. He responded, "I think the students in this class will have a difficult time coming up to that level because I think they're so far already behind." Although he tried to make his lessons match the skills found on the MSPAP, he was frequently disappointed in his students' lack of readiness to function well on higher order thinking activities.

> Each lesson that's in [the curriculum] I try to tailor more towards MSPAP....I also wanted to get some problem solving [into this lesson]. That's something I really try to incorporate into the class, and I feel on the MSPAP the kids are asked to do so much constructive problem solving, looking at a problem, trying to understand what they're asking for, trying to understand what steps need to be taken in order solve that problem. And I think that the kids in this school, I don't see them being prepared when they get to third grade to be able to do that. (F-20)

Mr. Sinclair was, in his words, "worn out" and "run down" by trying to reconcile the reality that "a lot of things that the kids come into school with are things that are way beyond my control" and being held accountable for student achievement. He intended to leave teaching at the end of the school year.

Themes

To briefly summarize the narratives, Ms. Knight was a teacher who was very engaged in making her classroom a place where students, despite their frequently distressful life circumstances, could participate in learning. She directed her teaching in a manner that she believed was aligned to the performance-based assessment system. Her students worked in groups and were directed to a MSPAP writing rubric. Ms. Knight recognized that her students' writing lacked depth. However, more depth was to be accomplished with more time spent, rather than through a different kind of writing instruction that perhaps would have integrated the rubric as a tool.

Ms. Peyton was willing to try new ways of teaching. By following the lesson "script" from the mathematics textbook she was piloting, she believed that her instruction was aligned with MSPAP. However, in her opinion, these new ways were often too time consuming. Mathematical concepts were not constructed in her classroom, but given to the students by the teacher. She believed that the ability to work successfully in groups was the key to MSPAP proficiency. Administrative requirements due to probation were demoralizing to her.

Ms. Hillman understood the difference between teaching for basic skills and teaching to solve complex problems. Because of the variety of testing situations she had to prepare her students for, she parsed her lessons in a regular pattern – on one day she taught a basic skills lesson for one test, another day a performance-based one for the other test, and for the rest, a "book lesson" to cover the curriculum. She was obviously a skilled classroom manager and adept at teaching a traditional lesson. Her admitted difficulties came in trying to elevate her lessons to a higher cognitive level. She believed she had to teach to her students' intellectual capacities as she perceived them to be at the moment. In years to come she was confident that they would be able to meet the expectations of performance-based testing, but not at this time.

Mr. Warner resisted changing his teaching in response to the accountability system. Believing the curricular choices of the administration were inadequate, he taught the content he believed needed teaching, with the materials of his choice, in the manner that he saw fit. An alternation of very directed reading and recitation with experiential lessons worked best for him.

Similarly, Ms. Clement did not change her teaching as a result of probation. She subverted some of external pressures and was outspoken about her conviction that she had better sense than the various agencies and actors that tried to impinge on her classroom.

Ms. Seegars, in contrast, was delighted with the instructional materials mandated by the school. She loved the scripted nature of the *Open Court* reading series and was becoming expert at teaching it. *Open Court* took the pressure of lesson planning off of her and it accomplished her goal of teaching students to read. She was confident that if students could read, when the time came, they would be successful at taking the MSPAP test. For her, phonics-based reading instruction superseded all else, even teaching the organizational and analytic skills that were part of lessons in other subject areas.

Mr. Carrothers faced the problems that many beginning teachers face. He received little instructional support or professional guidance. Student discipline was not, in his view, an administrative priority, and that combined with parental non-involvement made classroom management very difficult for him. He faulted his inability to raise his instruction to grade level on his students' lack of knowledge. Although he believed he was capable of designing creative meaningful lessons, factors beyond his control consumed his time and energy, making performance-based instruction an impossibility. As a result, survival teaching became his modus operandi.

Mr. Sinclair was in the same situation. Nonetheless, he made an effort to follow the adopted curriculum as closely as possible. He trusted it to contain the programmatic elements for good teaching that was appropriate for the accountability system, but was often disappointed in his trust. Caught between the enormous needs of the students and the ambitious goals of the accountability system, he opted to exit teaching.

Taken together, the eight narratives describe a variety of teachers with respect to teaching expertise, reflective capacity, and coping with the accountability system. Six of the eight teachers were seasoned teachers who ran effective classrooms. They found a way of surviving long term in their schools and reaching their challenging students. Two of the teachers, described in the last two vignettes, were fairly new in their careers, overwhelmed by the situation, and marginally effective with their students.

Quantitatively, marginally effective teachers were more common in the seven schools than the selection of just two cases would suggest. Two of the teachers, described in the first two vignettes, said they taught according to the new pedagogy. Two other teachers found a comfortable way of teaching, blending their own style with new programs, official curricula, and performance expectations. One was a loner in his craft, oblivious or resistant to external incursions, one was an outspoken critic of accountability in her school.

All of these teachers were acutely aware of the accountability system, not unlike the larger group of observed teachers whose voices and experiences are echoed in the eight vignettes. These vignettes describe how teachers in schools on probation interpret their task in light of external performance expectations, their own internal standards, and the reality of their students. Most of the other teachers whose classrooms we visited and who talked to us considered it unlikely that their students would reach the lofty goals the accountability had set out for them. In the eyes of many, students were already too far behind when they entered the teachers' classrooms. But teachers were willing to try concentrating on incremental learning steps. In negotiating the gap between external performance demands and the perceived abilities of their students, teachers foremost gauged their lessons to students. Ms. Muncy, a second grade reading teacher, said, "I teach to the needs of the students. That's what I feel I should do because if I try to teach up here and they're not up there, I'm wasting my time and my energy because they will never meet with success" (F-17).

For many teachers, this situation warranted careful attention to students' basic skills. The desirability of performance-based tasks was overshadowed by the necessity for basic skills development which made success on the MSPAP doubtful. Mr. Javali's sentiments about his sixth graders were much the same as Ms. Muncy's.

> These kids come to us so low...you're talking about second grade level, third grade level, and I think teachers really get discouraged because the expectations every day gets lower and lower and lower as far as what this child can do and their abilities. I think that's a problem when you look at it when it comes time for them to take MSPAP. (D-16)

Teachers felt justified teaching lessons in a format that traditionally "worked" for basic skills training. Basic skills tests that are part of the accountability system in middle schools legitimize this view. Not unlike Mr. Warner, the science teacher who insisted on using his own material, many seasoned teachers felt they knew what worked with their students and looked askance at the push for performance-based pedagogy.

In the view of many, MSPAP activities distinguished themselves mainly as writing activities, group work, and the use of particular analytic vocabulary. For fewer teachers, reflection on one's own thought process was also associated with MSPAP. This pattern holds across all observed teachers. Thus, often the conceptual depth of knowledge construction that is a core element of the new pedagogy was simplified into a set of activity formats. Judging from the debriefing interviews that accompanied lesson observations, teachers were, for the most part, not aware of this task trivialization. For example, in the area of writing, a key task of MSPAP, a second grade teacher described her challenge:

> When they get in MSPAP they have to do a lot of writing. So my understanding is when they sit down to explain a science [question] they might have to explain how did they build a battery – I'm just using that as an example. So instead of saying ideas, they would be able to write "first I had to do, second I had to do, third I had to do." (E-16)

Recall from the vignettes Ms. Knight's use of a writing rubric in her eighth grade language arts class. The rubric was present, pointed to, but not integrated into writing instruction. Other teachers noted the difficulty of using the writing rubrics as instructional tools:

> A lot of times we have to give them… writing rubric forms. I did that in the beginning, and I found that it was, it was confusing. So, a lot of times I won't give the rubric until *after* I've graded the paper, because, and I'll just, we'll just talk about it orally. But, if they see it in written form, for some reason, I don't understand why, someone actually said it's confusing" (D-18, sixth grade teacher).

As a result, writing practice for MSPAP often amounts to more, rather than better writing.

In one school, MSPAP-appropriate activities excluded the kinds of ambitious and complex projects that performance-based assessments are designed to encourage. Ms.

Moran, a seventh grade language arts teacher was observed the week after the MSPAP test. In her lesson, she introduced a longer-term project during which her students were to examine how teenagers were represented in the media. She undertook the project in conjunction with *Co-Nect*, one of a number of comprehensive school reform designs that all reconstitution-eligible schools in the district were mandated to select. The following dialog ensued in the debriefing interview:

> *Interviewer: Now do you usually have these long-term projects?*
>
> *Ms. Moran*: No, this is my first one.
>
> *Interviewer: Now, why have you decided to now, as opposed to let's say earlier in the year?*
>
> *Ms. Moran*: Because our principal told us to do it now.
>
> *Interviewer: Why did he tell you to do it now?*
>
> *Ms. Moran*: It's a part of a program, a three-year program called "Co-Nect" project based learning. And that's why.
>
> *Interviewer: I was speaking with another teacher here and she too is doing a project right now and what she had said was that because of MSPAP, she didn't have time to do these types of long-term projects before.*
>
> *Ms. Moran*: Right.
>
> *Interviewer: Now that the test is over, she is doing them. Is that sort of the same for you?*
>
> *Ms. Moran*: Basically yes, because we have been talking about the Co-Nect Project, but it really wasn't pushed until after the MSPAP. We wanted teachers to focus on MSPAP, students to focus on MSPAP. So now, since MSPAP is over, it's like a push to get the project done (B-21).

In this school, incidentally the same school in which Ms. Hillman taught her separate MSPAP, MFT, and regular lessons, MSPAP activities were defined as generic test attack skills and writing exercises with which the instructional specialist who signed responsible for this approach hoped "to crack the code of MSPAP" (informal conversation/Field notes School B). The case of Ms. Moran is just one example of many more debriefing interviews in which our probing into deeper layers of the teachers' understanding of performance-based teaching ran into incomprehension on the part of teachers.

Although teachers strongly expressed the notion that their lessons were first and foremost adapted to their students' ability and achievement levels, tests, new instructional programs, new curricula, and new textbooks reached deeply into many teachers' classrooms although external pressures and directions were multiple and often conflicting. Some teachers, like Ms. Hillman, believed that different kinds of assessments required different kinds of lessons. So in preparation for MSPAP, they parsed out what were frequently referred to as "MSPAP activities" at different times during the year. Getting students ready for MSPAP was a distinct objective, particularly as the test drew near. When the students were done with the test, the teachers could move on to other things. In the survey, more than half of the teachers had indicated that they were clearly directed by the accountability system. In the context of their classrooms, this clarity appeared to be much more laden with conflict.

Adoption of new instructional programs and curricula was one way that districts attempted to improve reconstitution eligible schools. In many cases, particularly in the elementary grades, teachers not only accepted their use, but appreciated their ease of use. The instructional materials told them what and how to teach.

> *Ms. Pratt* (fifth grade): I guess I should say we did have to change our teaching ways because now this program, *Houghton Mifflin*, gives you everything that you need to do, whereas before [the previous program] didn't. Now my style of teaching hasn't changed. I still teach the same way but it's just now it's more structured because I have to follow that book. (E-18)

> *Ms. Miller* (second grade): I prefer to teach in the mode that I taught today because I know where I'm going, boom, boom, boom and it's all written out for me instead of going from one back and forth....In *Open Court* [reading series] you have workshop and it tells you, "Teacher work with students, and this is what you're supposed to be doing"...And you don't have to sit down and say, "Well, what am I going to give my independent students to do...to keep them busy?" But it's right there. (E-16)
>
> *Ms. West* (fourth grade): For each story there is a different comprehension skill, grammar skill, different spelling words and I would say, as dictated by *Houghton Mifflin*, that they tell me what they need essentially and that's what I teach. (F-19)

Following scripted programs and teaching the official curriculum, lesson by lesson, was teachers' most frequent answer to our question as to what they did to help their students be successful on the MSPAP. These programs and curricula, adopted by authorities that presumably knew what they were doing, created certainty in the uncertain performance situation. By following them, many interviewees felt they had done their duty. They had fulfilled their obligations and thus assumed that they were doing right by the accountability system. Many teachers, some of them described in the vignettes, professed to faithfully implement the programs. Often times, prescribed curricula were implemented with little forethought. Surprises such as Mr. Sinclair encountered in his lesson on decimals and fractions were frequent occurrences in the observations.

Scripted programs were deceptively easy, but they too required training, for some teachers extensive training. Ms. Seegars, earlier described as an expert on *Open Court* in her school, worried that many of her colleagues were overwhelmed teaching the program and handling classroom discipline as well. In her view, the program was not very effective at her school because too many teachers either did not care to implement the program well, or were incapable of doing so. Observations in other teachers' classrooms corroborated Ms. Seegars' impression. And even she, the expert, frequently ran out of time to cover the prescribed material. In fact, whereas teachers said that students' needs superseded all other considerations when setting standards and planning for lessons, we found that many of the more compliant teachers felt obligated to teach the prescribed curricula, like Mr. Sinclair who hesitated to adjust his material to students below grade level. Self-confident seasoned teachers, such as Mr. Warner or Ms. Clement, on the other hand, learned to dodge the system and were quick to make adjustments when they felt it was appropriate.

All schools had procedures that required teachers to have MSPAP rubrics on their walls, use MSPAP words of the week, write detailed lesson plans, or keep portfolios on students. The vast majority of teachers complied with these routines. However, the manner in which they were used varied from teacher to teacher. Some, like Ms. Sandborn, an eighth grade language arts teacher, considered the extra duties a nuisance and an affront to her professionalism.

> A lot of times we feel like we're being watched all the time. Which is kind of insulting, especially with people who have been teaching for twenty years, ...and now all of a sudden they have to write up these picayune little lesson plans, and they have to have certain things on the walls. Not that the kids read them or anything, but you know, something that's just another thing that we're required to do (B-16).

One disgruntled teacher called pressure of accountability "a fire breathing dragon breathing down our necks" (B-19). But, some viewed the added pressure of their school's status as "good pressure." Ms. Walker, a first year teacher of fourth graders, asserted: "...it means the added pressure of having to get those test scores up. Honestly, sometimes I think that it's the best thing that could happen to a school because you are almost forced to improve...how can that be a bad thing?" (F-18). Ms. Walker was in the minority; most teachers resented the additional tasks due to probation and considered them exercises in standardization that failed to attack the real problems faced by the school.

For all their resentment, many teachers, almost in passing, expressed habitual compliance with administrative mandates intended to align instruction with MSPAP. Although they saw the accountability system as unhelpful and stacked against them, they did not reject it and did not outright condemn it. They truly served two masters. They wanted to concurrently accept the institutional weight of the state and be sensitive to the needs of their students, but the two pulled from opposite ends. For Mr. Clark, a novice eighth grade math teacher, the tension engendered a learning process:

> I don't think it's fair because I guess that I think most teachers probably believe that they're genuinely doing a good job. I don't think it's fair, but at the same time I have to accept responsibility for it because I'm part of it...and I could stand back and say, "Okay, well the school system is doing a crummy job or whatever." But at the same time...at the completion of my first full year in June, I can look back and say, "Well, hey, what did I learn from the school year? How can I grab these kids next school year so it won't be a cyclical process?" (G-17)

But more frequent was a diffusion of the tension. This was accomplished, as in the examples of Mr.Warner or Ms. Clement, through discarding the state's directives by virtue of their unreasonableness or irrelevance. Others, like Mr. Carrothers, discarded the students, as they were in his eyes, uneducable. But for the great majority, adopting officially sanctioned programs, curricula, and materials was the defensive retreat that relieved them of dissonance and delegated the decisions and responsibilities to a higher level.

3. Instructional Change in Kentucky

Descriptions of Kentucky classrooms are based on a small base of observations. Therefore Kentucky patterns are more anecdotal. Compared to the Maryland sample, teachers in the Kentucky schools harbored even more skepticism about their accountability system, making the goals, standards, and performance classifications less meaningful to them. But the schools tended to be more stable and collegial. At the same time, districts' programmatic and managerial mandates played less of a role while the state accountability agency expected each individual school to align its programs with the state core curriculum. Like the Maryland schools, Kentucky schools answered to performance pressures with a proliferation of external programs and consultants. But the Kentucky schools had wide discretion in selecting programs and strategies and the state dispatched a trained change agent to under-performing schools whose role it was to focus schools on key tasks of the reform, such as planning, portfolios, writing, and curriculum alignment. Perhaps as a result of this activity, improvement plans showed a higher degree of internalization.

Despite teachers' misgivings about the accountability system, programmatic changes in the four Kentucky schools seemed more home-grown. In the interviews teachers frequently referred to instructional innovations that were unique to the Kentucky assessments. Overall Kentucky interviewees seemed relatively well informed about those unique features, most notably portfolios and test-specific forms of writing. Conceivably, with less staff fluctuation, professional development and assessment-related training may have left their mark to a much larger degree than in the Maryland schools.

And compared to Maryland teachers, the Kentucky teachers in our sample took a different approach to programs and materials that addressed the state assessments. According to them, instructional materials were chosen with the state assessments in mind, but it was their choice which ones to use. Most teachers were quite selective about the materials they used, basing their decisions on the perceived needs of their students in light of the instructional goals that were important to them. For some teachers, instructional goals were to raise achievement on state assessments while many others revealed that the need to motivate students was a more persuasive influence on their decision making about instructional materials. Pressures from the school's accountability status did not seem to foreclose their own approaches:

> I consider my job almost more as a social worker at the same time as teacher. If I tried to just push academics without looking at that whole person, I would have a really hard time. I can maintain good control in my room because I understand my students, where they're coming from. They respect me and I respect them and it works out...(40-16, eighth grade language arts).

During the two years we conducted the study, the state scrapped one test (KIRIS) and replaced it with another test (CATS) that reverted back to more traditional testing formats. CATS expanded portions with subject-matter based multiple choice questions and reduced the importance of portfolios and performance-based tasks. As a result, compared to the MSPAP in Maryland, the Kentucky test was more connected to daily practices and required that teachers aligned their own teaching to the state core curriculum.

Curriculum alignment and the concern for coverage was a unique concern for Kentucky teachers. By contrast, for Maryland teachers the tasks of the MSPAP were seen as more generic and less subject-matter based. Some teachers reported on adapting their programs to the changing nature of the test:

> Math, there was such an emphasis in hands-on things for several years that paper/pencils just completely went out the window…we had our tests you know for several, the first few years I was here, and I didn't feel like they were prepared to do very, you know, the paper/pencil portion of the parts of the test. So we've changed our math and now we do a little of both you know. You can't go strongly one way or the other. You know they need some manipulative and the need the paper/pencil too. Now I think we've found a good mix of that and I think as a result of the testing that made us reflect on seeing a new bearing and you know get more paper/pencil things back... (10-02, Kindergarten)

Some were grateful for help on alignment: "I think the professional development that they're doing now is great, trying to help us understand the standards, what they expect from us, that kind of thing has been great" (30-1, eighth grade math). Others felt that curriculum alignment had to be practical to be helpful:

> Well, I have meetings the second, third, and fourth. This is because we're in decline, those are on the content standards. All of this stuff is all related to trying to get students' scores up and to help students succeed, so I think we have a lot of in-service meetings that are to help us do that…. [They are helpful] if there are actually practical things that we do…things that we can use as opposed to someone coming in and giving you real general information. (40-3, eighth grade language arts)

And a third group was skeptical about claims of alignment:

> Well, it is supposed to be, somewhat, but because we're all allowed to choose textbooks and textbooks are different and the information in the textbooks are different. Yes, you might have a general idea of the genre or whatever is similar, but you've got so many choices where the test is narrow as far as I'm concerned, unless it's an open response question. It's very narrow and maybe you haven't hit that point. (40-16)

While this teacher was rather unconcerned about coverage and alignment, others were confused and wished for more clarity:

> Everything's getting so big…When you get bigger you lose a lot of control…If we were told exactly what we should teach specifically, but we're not. You're given opportunities to use trade books, various

> textbooks, and creative ideas, and then we're testing, and that range of opportunity is so broad and the testing is so narrow that it's really hard to hit everything they know…so I think it's a really difficult way to look at the teacher and say that she has been accountable or not. (30-5)

But most teachers said they tried to cover the core curriculum as best they could:

> Well, each school does an aligned curriculum, so that's what I'm supposed to teach. That's my aspect of it....What we try to do is make sure that we have given them a thorough review for the test. We try to get as much through as possible. With the test, they give you roughly what percentages, like 10 percent is going to be weather and stuff like that, so you say, "Well, okay, it's going to be 10 percent weather, so I can give them worksheets on weather and give them a project on weather." Things like that....To me, it's always banking the knowledge and using the knowledge for the test. To me, it's an essential. (40-15, sixth grade science)

None of the teachers we visited in their classrooms reported instructional sea changes as a result of KERA or CATS. Most teachers described their instructional changes as "add[ing] skills here and there" (10-10, second grade math). Patterns of instruction in the small number of classrooms we visited in the Kentucky schools were very similar to the patterns encountered in the Maryland schools. Most lessons were taught on a basic level, some lessons were marginal. Ms. Ellington taught a typical lesson on a basic level. After introducing vocabulary words at the beginning of the lesson, Ms. Ellington had her eighth grade students read a magazine article aloud. The students enjoyed the reading. She interrupted students to clarify words and content. After finishing the article, students were to write in their journals about a trip to a local amusement park. The lesson ended when the bell rang. Students were disciplined throughout the class and participated well. Ms. Ellington had clearly found a connection to her students, but the observers were curious about her beliefs about the academic content of her lesson. When asked about her objective, she replied:

> *Ms. Ellington:* To read. The reading and comprehension and overall, my most important objective is that they will read. We have all different ways to do that. The thing we did yesterday was newspapers and they were given questions and they have to find the answers in the newspaper, they have to read the articles. The goal is to make them like reading....Today I would say I liked this lesson. I thought it was successful...I thought the reading was exactly what I wanted it to be. I had everybody on task, everybody reading, listening, comprehending, which is what I wanted.
>
> *Interviewer: How about the writing?*
>
> *Ms. Ellington:* Well, I do a lot of that....At this point, they're starting to show some ownership for it because they know they're going to take this with them. I've given them examples of memoirs that I brought from home and things I go back and look at of my own....Well, we did "The Diary of Anne Frank" and they did a diary, so they know that these things can last because they are so into the here and now that they don't think there's ever going to be a tomorrow. They just have to immediately be gratified, so I said, "You're going to put this away and some day your grandchildren..." I keep trying to make them think there's a future.
> (40-16)

For Ms. Ellington, it was key that students were under control, worked, and participated with interest. Her attention to student motivation made this lesson one of the better ones observed. Academic content, however, was not a category that Ms. Ellington entertained in her lesson analysis. In her mind the lesson was, however loosely, connected to the core curriculum:

> Well, we've got the standards that we use and I would have to hate to quote you which one I was doing, but I know I was doing one of them. So yeah, we have these standards we meet and part of it involves reading and then the writing of course. We're doing a lot of pieces, it depends on what we're working on, so we're covering the writing parts of the standards as well. Everything that we do in here pretty much covers one area or another and we also use all different forms and ways of teaching and learning. (40-16)

Ms. Ellington considered herself a good teacher, and not unlike the teachers in the Maryland schools who felt they had found a way to be effective with challenging students, she dismissed the school's performance status. In the debriefing interview we asked her if the fact that the school was declared "in decline" or "non-rewards" had any effect on the way she taught:

> Yes and no. Yes because there are certain things that I must do to... They have requirements now for us, like we have to do so many questions with the kids, like open response questions and things like that, so yes, it affects me in that way. The curriculum is not changed any. The curriculum is the same. If they were not here, if I'm doing my job, then I'd still be doing the same curriculum. Channel 11 was in here and they asked the same question. They said, "What are you doing...blah blah blah?" And I said, "Well, the academics are still the same. It's just our accountability that's up for grabs right now." We have to show that we're doing these things by performing, jumping through certain hoops. But no, I don't think I'm a better teacher because I'm in decline trying harder. I think that if you're not a good teacher, you're not going to be a good teacher no matter what. If you're a good teacher, that's the kind of person that you are, that's what you care about. In other words, if you're a good teacher, it's because you like to teach, you like to get the information across. I don't think I am doing anything different. I do post stuff, though, because I'm supposed to. If I didn't have to, yes, they were there, were there four years ago, so yeah, I would still post things. I didn't have all the nice little things that they give us, so now I can label everything I do....We have to give an open response question every six weeks and we have to turn it in. Those kinds of things. We have to give information to people. We have to post these content standards. We have to succeed on a test that the students take. In other words, on the CATS. We will have to succeed. The students will take the test, but their grades are going to have to be high enough that we succeed. (40-16)

As in the case of many Maryland teachers, probation left the core of teaching untouched, but stipulated a number of easily monitored activities that increased practice for the unique features of the test. Even teachers for whom the accountability system was not all that meaningful and relevant felt compelled to comply with these demands.

We observed a mathematics lesson in Ms. Linus's class. Ms. Linus tried to teach a lesson on probability to her eighth grade students, but her lesson was frequently interrupted, few students participated, and some misbehaved. Ms. Linus was a first-year teacher and clearly exhausted from the school year. Her first year had bruised her emotionally leaving her confidence low. Asked about her lesson, she replied: "I would hope that somebody learned something. That's about the most positive thing that I can say about it." (40-08). Her teaching situation, not unlike that of many novice teachers in the eleven schools, was overshadowed by concerns for student discipline and classroom control. She was unable to analyze her lesson. In survival mode, she was fixated on her students' unreasonable behavior. When asked if there were areas where she felt the lesson fell short or where students should have done better, she explained:

> *Ms. Linus:* I think that if there had been more interest, they could have gotten a lot more out of the lesson....They do not care about bringing home a poor grade. Apparently, for most of them, they really don't. I was amazed at that, coming from the school I came from. They're not interested in learning. Eighth graders aren't for the most part. Normal eighth graders are not interested in learning. The parents have to motivate them. I know my own children...If I had not insisted, they wouldn't have done anything. I guess they're normal without anybody to care about them and make them achieve.
>
> *Interviewer: If you had to do it over again, would you teach this lesson in the same way?*
>
> *Ms. Linus:* I really do not know. By the time that this class, by the time I get to where I can teach, I'm so burned out and so flustered that it's hard for me to really be objective about what I should've done differently. It's sort of a survival. I'm just doing the best I can with the situation I've gotten. (40-08)

The accountability system and the fact that her school was on probation was meaningless to her – as it was to many novice teachers. This eighth grade teacher had holes in her understandings about the system: "I don't know anything about that stuff. I don't understand the rewards, I don't understand the accountability system. This is my first year in the system and I don't understand it" (40-08). But when we asked her about her lesson's alignment with the core curriculum, her understanding about what she was to teach was certain: "Yes, definitely. I always teach by the state standards" (40-08).

A few lessons were explicitly performance-based according to the interviewed teachers. One of those lessons was a science lesson that was taught in a 90-minute block. The teacher was exceptionally unconventional, but not unlike his colleagues fairly unencumbered by assessment pressures. Mr. Bixby had set up several stations in his room that students could elect to work in, such as preparing presentations, caring for animals, working on ditto sheets, and reading books. At the beginning of the lesson, students settled into the work stations but were allowed to change them after a while when they wanted to. The work in stations procedure was interrupted by a student presentation on "body parts" that was rather confusing and disorganized. Throughout the lesson, however, students were busy and mostly content in his class, but observers noted a concern for the academic quality of their work. In Mr. Bixby's rationale for this lesson, assessment pressures paled in the face of a struggle for the students' motivation and cooperation at their (low) level of academic performance:

> Well, I see at sixth grade, it's just trying to get them to think more logically. The objective was for her to do her presentation and for them to think and to assess her and then to internalize that assessment and say now, "She did that, I can do it better," or "I would have done it this way," so when they do their presentation, hopefully it'll be better. That's really the goal. For them to just be able to look and see what other people are doing and say, "Well, I can do that," or "She should have done this," or "Why did she do that?" Stuff like that because it's a lot of what we do here. You will take this information and write it up and people will assess it. It's never too early to know how to assess constructively. A lot of it is also socialization. To me, a lot of it is socialization. I think a big part of what I do is socialization. I try to get the science in around that. (40-15)

The interviewers discussed his classroom set up with him:

> *Interviewer: What about those kids that worked on the worksheets?*
>
> *Mr. Bixby:* Well, those are some of the ones that just don't want to do anything else. They're just really trying to shut down. The best thing that I can do for them right now is to give them worksheets to review part of what we cover during the year so they are germane to our

> curriculum....There are some kids that come and go, but usually the ones who come and go are some of the smartest ones, but they're not here for the instruction. If they're not here for the instruction, then they can't begin to...They don't have the writing assignments that you may give them over the weekend. They haven't collected what you've asked them to collect. There always needs to be worksheets for those students that come and go, and the students really do them. It's not the best thing, but at least they're getting some knowledge in their head and all the information is right there.
>
> *Interviewer: How many of those in the class would you say are the ones that come and go?*
>
> *Mr. Bixby*: I would say sometimes around one-third. A lot of the time they'll come in when you're in the middle of a project, and they'll go, "What project? What are you talking about?" So I always have worksheets for them so they can at least get points....Right, and you really have to have...to have a different assessment for those students.
>
> *Interviewer: What about the kids who took care of the animals? Was that by chance?*
>
> *Mr. Bixby*: Sometimes... Now it's Friday. Sometimes you have to look and see what they're going to be, you know, where their minds are. If they come in, I can use the animals sometimes. "Okay, you can work on the animal for a while, then you need to sit down and take care of some business." That kind of allows them to get a little bit of activity out of it, plus they're making a positive contribution, and then they can kind of settle down after that. I really use the animals a lot to do that. I wish I had more animals....As a teacher, you just have to let go. It's far easier and far more difficult than people think. Just let go and kind of let them take over your vibe. I don't think a lot of teachers know that. (40-15)

When asked how he bridged the academic demands of the test with the way he had adapted to his students, Mr. Bixby explained:

> I think what you're asking me is...when we're using the book more and stuff like that, working towards the test, the students are coming and may be grooming the animals and stuff like that, they have to do a little catch-up. To me, it's better to have them do a little catch-up because when they come in, they get a good feeling, they settle down, and they begin to work. This is just not the traditional breed of student where they come in, they sit down, open the mouth, and they're ready to be fed. It just doesn't happen. (40-15)

4. Summary

We have looked at how teachers teach in the eleven schools on probation, how they reflect on their teaching, how they interpret the pedagogical demands of the performance-based assessments, and lastly, how they reflect on the presumed gap between the high demands of the accountability system and the reality of their students' performance. We found that most lessons were conducted on a basic level, and quite a number of them marginally at that. Though most teachers view themselves as highly skilled and not at fault for the performance of their school, they, for the most part, teach in rather conventional ways. Many lessons lacked basic thematic coherence.

We saw a discrepancy between the way teachers taught and what is required to be successful on the state assessments. How can this discrepancy be explained? To begin with, (1) only a few teachers take the gap between external performance expectation and internal performance reality as an occasion to learn. The response of the majority is defensiveness and compliance. A minority, many of them quite effective with their classes, doubts the reasonableness of the accountability system. Many more point to the abysmally low achievement level of their students and their challenging living circumstances. Generally speaking, teachers do not appear as particularly self-critical and analytical about their teaching. (2) Many teachers interpret performance-based pedagogy as a set of discrete skills that are addressed in specific test preparation schemes. The conceptual side of the new assessments is often overlooked. The intellectual core of the ambitious state assessments remains external to daily teaching routines. Thus, there is little awareness of how far off the mark these schools actually are in terms of teaching in ways appropriate to the assessments. (3) Teachers receive mixed messages. Not only do they have to cover basic skills and performance-based tests, they also perceive their students needing direct instruction, drill and practice, and tight control. Thus, classroom reality, as experienced by them, deters them from loosening the reins on instruction. (4) Though new instructional programs are acceptable to many, the accounting for the specific tasks (e.g., requirements to present a certain number of writing prompts) and the staging of teacher compliance that holds sway in almost all schools turns them away from embracing probation as a serious matter that goes to the core of their daily teaching.

Generally, teachers show willingness to implement authoritatively prescribed solutions to performance problems. Save those many inexperienced teachers in the schools that struggle helplessly with basic teaching competencies, most of the more seasoned teachers whose classrooms we visited might do well in an accountability system that calls for more rigorous instruction in basic skills. Such a system would be more closely pegged to already existing teaching styles and performances. But the investigated accountability systems are more ambitious. They combine the press for more work effort with a demand for a new pedagogy. This change necessitates that teachers are motivated to learn and become proactive. In the observed classrooms, however, such learning is widely absent.

The situation in the four Kentucky schools is similar, though teachers are somewhat more self-directed. Judging from the Kentucky data, teachers in the four schools integrated assessment-specific skills and instructional formats (test vocabulary, portfolio, writing prompts) into their instruction and they are striving to teach according to the state's core curriculum. But at the same time, teachers feel less regulated and fairly autonomous in their decisions to teach according to their best judgment and to select programs that suit their needs. Observed teachers, for the most part, do not translate ambitious external performance demands into high internal performance expectations that could foster a critical evaluation of one's teaching. The "in decline" label of probation, rejected as unfair by large majorities, has heightened consideration of the assessments, has brought in new programs and consultants, and compelled teachers to incorporate test-specific features into their classrooms, but has not exerted a strong press towards broader instructional changes. On the positive side, neither in the Maryland nor in the Kentucky classrooms did we encounter much of the mind-numbing test drill and practice that has been found to accompany accountability systems in which traditional basic skills tests have become high-stakes.

PART VII. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Across the United States, incentive policies that reward schools for good performance and penalize them for failing to maintain acceptable performance levels have proliferated. Part and parcel of these policies is the status of probation. The sanction of probation works on schools in several ways: it may attach a stigma, make a threat, heighten scrutiny, issue a warning signal, and symbolize public concern and commitment. We define probation as a performance status, institutionalized in various nomenclatures, that publicly identifies a school as under-performing according to the stipulated criteria of its accountability agency. The imposition of probation on low-performing schools as a means to stimulate their improvement is still novel and nascent in most state and local school systems. This report described what schools do when they are put on probation, that is, when the public stigma of underperformance, the prospect of more severe penalties, increasing oversight and scrutiny, the reception of an official warning, or the signaling of support are to challenge educators to reverse performance decline and make improvements in their schools.

Probation, as a novel policy feature, is embedded in an arsenal of traditional educational policy levers. Once an accountability agency, for example a state department of education or a local district, has put a school on probation, four main policy levers define its relationship with the school: sanctions, performance standards and assessments, process controls, and resource provisions. Sanctions, standards, controls, and resources may exert pressure, activate goals, constrain actions, or enhance capacities on the part of responding schools. In other words, pressures in the form of public stigma, threats of

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more severe penalties, and scrutiny may activate teachers out of fear or discomfort; standards may provide the orientation for teachers' own goal formation and focus, process controls may stipulate specific organizational or instructional behavior by mandating planning features or instructional programs, and resources may raise the competence of individual educators or the strength of organizations. In dealing with their under-performing schools, accountability system designs in the U.S. differ in the way they balance sanctions, standards, process controls, and resources. In this report we looked at two such designs, the Maryland and Kentucky accountability systems.

We began our investigation with five key questions in mind. Does probation:

1. coincide with a rise in the schools' performance scores?
2. motivate teachers and administrators to become engaged in school improvement and increase work effort?
3. foster individual and organizational learning in search for the means to improve?
4. make the schools more effective?
5. create momentum for teachers to change their instruction?

Our questions led us to examine schools' responses to probation on the levels of individual motivational dispositions, organizational processes, and actions in the instructional core. To answer these questions we looked at state-wide test score data (for Maryland), read school improvement plans from a sizable number of schools on probation, and studied eleven focal schools in-depth with the help of surveys, interviews, and observations of classrooms and meetings. All eleven schools serve traditionally

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underprivileged student populations as indicated by high proportions of poor and minority students. The eleven schools are characterized by problems typical for these kinds of environments: high student mobility, discipline problems, lack of parental involvement, low overall achievement, lack of learning motivation among students, irregular attendance, health and nutrition problems, etc. Clearly, these eleven schools are challenging work environments. Thus, in our study the signal and status of probation would have to prove its mettle under challenging circumstances. But this is in line with the policy talk that accompanies high-stakes accountability in general in which probation comes across as a "get tough" measure for hard cases.

Three broad categories that define schools' responses to probation lend themselves to summarize our findings: pressure, meaning, and capacity. We hypothesize that educators may act in response to probation because the status exerts pressure due to stigma, threat, or scrutiny, fosters meaningful goal development, or mobilizes and enhances social and individual capacities at the work place. We assume that probation will have to move beyond a dynamic of external pressure if the policy is to motivate changes in the instructional core. Such changes happen if teachers come to accept accountability standards as reasonable and fair despite performance shortcomings and if they have the capacity to enact the new standards and the opportunity to learn new pedagogies. Nevertheless, all three dynamics play a role in molding teachers' and schools' responses.

1. External Pressures

In a dynamic of external pressure, public stigma and threats of further penalties as well as external mandates and clear authoritative directions coupled with internal enforcement of rules and policies mobilize educators by instilling fear, anxiety, shame and compliance and by prescribing specific work behaviors. While most teachers at the eleven focal schools said they were aware of their school's status, they lacked detailed knowledge of the mechanics of the accountability system. Most found it hard to picture further penalties and final sanctions. Zero-based staffing, teachers' job loss and the like did not make sense in their view because these measures ignored these teachers' indispensability for a hard job that does not have too many takers. Indeed, policy makers in either state have applied final sanctions sparingly (Maryland) or not at all (Kentucky). The threat of further penalties was a distant possibility for most teachers. Low job commitment diminished this threat even further. Large proportions of teachers, particularly in the Maryland schools, were ready to leave their school on probation, but even in Kentucky where job commitment was higher, teachers' prime reason to leave their schools was to evade the additional pressures of probation.

Probation was not a threat but a nuisance due to the public stigma that attached itself (in varying strengths) to these schools and due to the "fish bowl" atmosphere in which teachers carried out their daily duties after the school was placed on probationary status. But even when teachers described initial shock, fear, and shame at the time of identification, they found ways to personally distance themselves from the school's status. This does not mean, however, that probation was ignored altogether. A majority of teachers found the attainment of higher test scores important and an overwhelming number wanted to see their school shed the probation label. But such striving was more in pursuit of professional status than educational values. Although some teachers, particularly senior teachers with the confidence of having found a way to be effective with their challenging students, expressed defiance as they questioned the states' superior capacity to do the job, overwhelmingly, the states' rule making authority was accepted. Many voiced their willingness to comply and be directed by the accountability system in their instructional decisions, but the pressure emanating from probation was mild.

We studied the relationship between different levels of work motivation as a result of probation (i.e. reported engagement and work effort) and dispositional and contextual factors associated with external pressure, meaning, and capacity. While there was some evidence that mild external pressure played a role in motivating teachers, the pattern was ambiguous. Factors discriminating more highly engaged teachers from less engaged teachers were more strongly associated with a pattern of external pressure and direction than with factors suggesting other dynamics. More highly engaged educators (i.e. those more involved and affected in their work) attached more importance to raising test scores and exiting probation, were more directed by the accountability system, and considered their principal an enforcer of rules and policies to a greater degree than less engaged educators. Work effort, however, was more strongly associated with capacities at the work place though some factors related to external pressure made a difference for levels of work effort as well.

On the level of the organization, work place interactions, improvement strategies, and patterns of planning betrayed the influence of external pressure, but this influence was intertwined with internal organizational capacities. Across the seven Maryland schools a specific change dynamic was discernible. This dynamic consisted of determined principal management, additional resources for new specialist personnel and retraining efforts, and top-down enforcement of externally generated programs and strategies. Indicators of rigidity showed up strongly while indicators of organization-wide learning (e.g., discussion or debate during meetings) showed up more weakly, although teachers as individuals and in groups gained new skills through participation in staff development workshops. Rather than staging crisis and opening channels of inquiry into solutions with broad faculty participation, administrators tended to mute the voices of outspoken critics who might question the undisputed reality and legitimacy of the accountability system but whose ardor might also expose the school to honest self-evaluation. The principals stressed consensus and unity. Teachers were willing to rally around their leaders as long as they sensed tangible progress, particularly in the area of student discipline and order. Across the seven Maryland schools, teachers resented the absence of control, resisted crude managerial control, but accepted increased control in those schools where it was laced with traditional paternalism and concrete assistance.

School improvement plans were written in the nexus of external pressure. School improvement plans were mostly compiled by small teams of teachers on released time and administrators. Teachers, sometimes even department heads and other leaders, were primarily providers of information, not decision makers. The overarching concern of administrators was to produce plans that could meet external approval. Repeated revisions demanded by district and state personnel resulted in a rather isomorphic pattern across schools that did not differ according to school size or actual performance development. In the plans, goals were calculated according to formulas without discussion of the apparently wide gap between promised performance gains and past performance records. Evaluation of past activities was rare. The staggering number of activities in the plans revealed an approach to school improvement that was comprehensive to a fault. Lacking signs of internalization, the plans were mainly written to satisfy an external agency. Internally, if they were not shunted to the sidelines, administrators used the plans to obligate staff to implement officially condoned and expected activities. Thus, the plans served to fulfill external obligations by means of internal managerialism.

The 46 analyzed plans from Maryland and data from the seven Maryland schools gave testimony to the success of the state to involve schools and districts in the compilation of impressive, largely standardized documents that strongly reflected the accountability agency's model of school change. Most likely, this involvement did not extend to the large majority of regular classroom teachers, but it forced the most active parts of the teaching force, administrators and career teachers with special assignments, to apply the state's lens to their problem of underperformance and, at the very least, to symbolically align their own view of change with the state's program. Despite widespread complaints, the SIPs gave plan writers occasion for a thorough learning experience, an exercise in aligning their mental models (Senge, 1994) with the thinking of the accountability agency. In the more passive parts of the teaching force, the SIP gave occasion for an activation of compliance.

This is not to say that rigidities were observable in all eleven schools or that they were negative in all respects. In two schools, principals responded to external pressure by becoming overly controlling without offering support. In these schools, faculties eventually resisted or even rebelled. A pattern of rigidity was also more strongly present in schools that we identified as "moving." Here the administration's greater vigilance was often associated with more order, improved student discipline, and the delivery of services, strategies, and programs, the implementation of which became subject to principals' oversight. In the moving schools support and enforcement came hand in hand. But in some of the Maryland schools principals were either not strong enough or not willing to play the role of active enforcers. In these cases, tangible steps for improvement were missing. Thus, without the principal as a conduit, external probation pressures dissipated without much effect.

The seven Maryland cases suggested a connection between probation and organizational rigidity, but the Kentucky cases suggested otherwise. In the Kentucky schools, the relationship between principals and staff appeared to be more collegial and supportive. Teachers did not report an increased tightening of management as a result of probation, and school improvement plans showed more signs of internalization.

Though all 11 schools had the probation designation in common, the situation of the schools in the two states differed in many other respects. As compared to the Kentucky schools, principals in the seven Maryland schools felt under much more performance pressure as a result of probation for a number of reasons. They believed their tenure at the school was tied to the raising of test scores. They were subject to district intervention and encountered visits from external monitors with whom they were not familiar. At the same time these principals dealt with faculties that were much more inexperienced, transient, and uncommitted. By contrast, concern about probation was lower in the four Kentucky schools; teachers and principals in three of the four schools had long and established relationships with each other; and the Highly Skilled Educators dispatched by the state were involved in the school's inner workings and invested in the school's success. Thus the connection between probation and rigidity, detected in the Maryland cases, was due to the pressures of probation in conjunction with other local and school-internal factors.

2. Educational Meanings

Moving beyond external pressure and direction, probation could foster the development of performance goals that become meaningful to teachers. When accountability becomes meaningful, educators act because they recognize the standards and goals of the accountability system, or the rewards the system bestows, as important, fair, valid, realistic, and attainable. Teachers' attitudes towards the accountability system can be summarized as follows. Relatively small numbers of teachers perceived their accountability system as fair, thought that the performance goals were realistic and believed in the evaluative validity of the system for good teaching.

In their "failure analysis," teachers externalized and de-personalized causes of under-performance. First and foremost, they saw environmental factors due to the socio-economic status of students as the key factor. Faulty district and state policies, low-performing feeder schools, unskilled colleagues and administrators were also mentioned. Administrators and instructional specialists mainly pointed their fingers at teachers' instruction. The system was widely held to be unfair because the measurements were said to be unreflective of teachers' hard work. The system was said to compound a sense of failure among students who had a hard time coping with their underprivileged position in society and among teachers who were subject to a tough work environment. Teachers stated that the tests were not geared to the reading and comprehension levels of their students and that they did not cover many qualities of good teaching. Doubts prevailed about the calculation of scores and the wisdom of overly ambitious performance-based standards.

Teachers were more prone to evaluate themselves based on observable behavior and reactions from students and other adults at school than based on the state's assessments. Personalization, incrementalism, and a basic skills orientation prevailed over data driven-ness, ambitious growth targets, and performance-based pedagogy. The gap between the states' demands on one hand, and the needs of the students and the reality of the schools on the other hand, was strongly felt. It was an underpinning of teachers' self-image that students came first and that instruction needed to be adapted to their students' abilities and motivations. For the most part, educators in these schools derived meaning for their work from sources other than the accountability system that had unfairly declared them failures.

Educators from the eleven schools heeded the system, but they did so without conviction. More teachers let themselves be guided by the system and wanted to be rid of probation than commit themselves to the actual performance goals or view their own performance through the lens of the system. Having serious misgivings about the accountability system, an overwhelming majority of respondents in either state criticized the system's status quo.

As to differential levels of performance motivation, teachers from the 11 schools who were reportedly more motivated by probation did not attach more meaning to the accountability system. On the contrary, those that reportedly exerted more work effort were at the same time more skeptical about the value of the accountability system. Likewise, in moving schools teachers were also more skeptical about fairness, realism, and validity of the accountability system than in stuck schools. Thus, the evidence from this study suggests that the accountability systems in the two states largely failed to instill meaningful performance goals in educators working in the studied schools on probation.

We initially stated that teachers attach intrinsic meaning to the status of probation when they embrace the goals of the accountability system as an expression of their own performance ideals or they value extrinsic reward, in this case exit from probation, when they want to lift public stigma and administrative scrutiny. The systems insufficiently tap into teachers' personal performance standards, but they tap more forcefully into teachers' concerns for professional status. The problem is that the desire to exit probation is somewhat divorced from performance self-evaluations and self-directed steps towards improvement. As a result, school improvement for the majority of the teachers in the 11 schools was mainly other-directed, prodded by administrators, instructional specialists, external consultants, staff developers, etc. whose activities were moderately fueled by a common desire among teachers to be rid of the stigma and scrutiny that probation entailed.

Consequently, among the Maryland schools probation primarily triggered managerial initiatives on the part of anxious administrators and mobilized career teachers working on compliant teachers whose commitment to the organization was shaky. In some schools this resulted in a strengthening of hierarchy, control, and ultimately effectiveness, in others in strife or fragmentation.

All schools engaged in extensive professional development, implemented mandated programs, and ran test preparation schemes. But only in a few schools was the intervention fine-grained enough to reach daily instructional routines. None of the Maryland schools were able to unfreeze and engage in a process of internalizing accountability, that is, of finding meaning in the probationary status, a process that might have involved a personalized analysis of performance shortcomings and an active search for solutions that were meaningful and appropriately adapted to classroom realities as perceived by teachers. Although the Kentucky responses in the four schools we studied were more site-based and not as rigid, the schools engaged in amassing a "war chest" of external programs and consultancies that crowded out work on teacher performance expectations and key instructional routines, tasks that were advocated by the highly skilled educators at some of the schools.

3. Individual and Organizational Capacities

If probation was to send a message that something is awry with employee performance in the organization so targeted, that message was not received by teachers. Across all 11 schools, overwhelming majorities of teachers consistently rated themselves as highly qualified educators who were well prepared, highly effective and caring, with a strong sense of efficacy, with skills that match the challenge of accountability and high performance, and with the willingness to exert above-average effort. Far from being tainted by their schools' designation as lacking or failing, these teachers expressed certainty about their professional quality and worth. Only a very small minority conceded in the anonymous survey that they might need help. The sentiment prevailed that teachers did the best they could under the circumstances and that they had the capacity to be successful in the state accountability system.

This is not to say that educators at these sites did not see room for improvement. Many conceded low test scores and shortcomings of their school's services, but they perceived their students as needy and their schools as resource-starved. Hence, improvements were associated with upgrading and expansion of services that required the infusion of fresh resources. These resources financed interventions such as building repairs, relieving of overcrowding, air conditioning, class-size reduction, remedial reading, in-house suspension centers, attendance monitors, enhanced computer capabilities, character education, field trips, mentor and master teachers, release time for training and staff development, textbooks and other materials as well as tutorial, after-school, and summer school programs, to name a few. From this perspective it makes sense that many educators at the 11 schools were inclined to re-interpret probation as a resource deficit or capacity enhancement signal indicating the school's need for help rather than an employee under-performance problem. Teachers constructed a continuity between earlier re-distributive policies and probation. The latter became one more category alongside poverty grants, Title I funds, etc. that established a legitimate claim to more support.

If probation is more strongly linked to organizational capacity than effort, then it makes sense that improvement expectations for one's school are less tied to one's own performance and more to capacity or service enhancements for the school that result from additional resources. Doubts are widespread that accountability goals are realistic and "hard work" will pay off since test scores are calculated as uncontrollable yearly snapshots and subject to unexplainable fluctuations regardless of effort. In this situation, teachers' optimism and their expectancies for success and reward are more strongly tied to resources than performance. Interviewed principals were quite clear about this connection between resources and improvements, and some Maryland principals in schools that actually received additional funds confided that they could not afford to lose the probation label as long as substantial moneys were connected with it. Meanwhile, teachers in these schools begrudged that they were made to endure probation stigma and scrutiny in return for resources that their school were in need of, regardless of the status.

We saw that the mild pressure of stigma and scrutiny moved teachers along despite a lack of personal meaningfulness of the accountability goals. Teachers in moving schools and those that were reportedly more motivated by probation attached even less meaning to probation. Meaning was clearly not the key factor that defined teachers' reactions to the pressures of probation, but capacity was. It made a big difference in teachers' responses to probation whether it came attached with additional resources or not. In those schools where probation was perceived as merely punitive, the signal was more strongly resented as an expression of additional neglect. Teachers that were more motivated to increase performance as a result of probation were also the ones who saw district and state interventions and capacity building measures as more forceful for improving their school. Both schools identified as moving were supported by their district with additional resources, and in both schools teachers saw interventions and capacity building measures as more effective for school improvement relative to the stuck schools.

But internal organizational capacities were key factors in molding teachers' responses to probation as well. The case studies showed that without skillful and determined principal leadership schools were at a loss. On the contrary, signs of fragmentation were observed in schools in which teachers felt the additional pressure of probation without a principal in place who formulated an adequate response, though the mild pressure of probation was never the sole or even main cause of the school's drifting – rather the former compounded the latter. In some schools with poor leadership the signal of probation was largely ignored while in others, where the signal was more strongly present, it made the negative consequences of lack of leadership more acutely felt.

Higher levels of performance motivation and the higher observed activity levels in the moving schools strongly coincided with teachers rating their colleagues as more skillful and their faculties as more collegial. Of all the factors related to organizational capacity, these were the two factors on which moving and stuck schools, as well as teachers with higher and lower levels of reported work effort, differed the most. Principal leadership was an important factor as well. In moving schools and among those individuals exerting more effort, the principal was seen as more supportive. Engagement, on the other hand, more strongly coincided with the perception of the principal as an enforcer. These quantitative findings were corroborated by qualitative data from the cases. In the interviews, educators mentioned internal social capacities of the school ("the faculty pulling together") as a key condition for their success in conjunction with the provision of external capacity building. According to our observations, when schools moved in the Maryland context, they did so when internal and external capacities lined up in a particular way. The availability of determined, yet supportive principal leadership in combination with the skill and empowerment of instructional and other specialists as well as externally provided training opportunities for ordinary classroom teachers translated external pressures into internal influence over school organization and instruction.

Thus, schools devised their response to the pressures of probation in a dynamic of organizational capacity. In their move to take up the challenge of probation, schools banked on organizational cohesion, collegial support, determined and supportive leadership, the available skills of instructional and other specialists, and the provision of external capacity building. Interactions at the work place were social sources of individual performance motivation and generated momentum for organizational responses to probation. The provision of external support, in the form of additional resources, personnel, materials, professional development, or change agentry not only enhanced internal organizational capacity, but also influenced dispositions towards the accountability system. It is important, however, to keep in mind that internal capacity, particularly among the seven Maryland schools regardless of school site variations, was precarious. Schools' responses were crafted in a highly unstable organizational context characterized by high teacher turnover and high percentages of inexperienced and novice teachers.

We have discussed how the pressure of probation, the meaning of accountability goals, and the availability of internal and external capacities molded individual teachers' and schools' responses to probation. We concluded from the study's evidence that mild pressure, lack of personal meaning attached to the goals and classifications of the accountability system, high sense of personal capacity, and varied levels of organizational capacity and capacity building plausibly explain these responses. Many ordinary classroom teachers were irked and discomforted by the stigma and scrutiny of the probationary status and felt inclined to undo the damage to their professional standing. Widely skeptical about the rightfulness of the system and confident about their professional abilities, they did not derive meaningful goals from the system that tapped into their own performance ideals and values. Expected performance goals only weakly motivated teachers to examine their own performance and engage in instructional changes. Individual performance motivation and school site responses differed widely based on a school's organizational capacity in the form of skilled leadership, social interactions at the work place, specialists' know-how, and external support.

4. Differences between Kentucky and Maryland Schools

The dynamics of external pressure, meaning, and capacity play out differently in the studied schools from the two states, with the consequence that the Maryland schools responded to probation with organizational rigidity whereas such pattern was not observed in the four Kentucky schools. Schools from both states had in common that the systems' standards and assessments generated only weak performance motivation beyond a desire to raise test scores to be rid of the probation label. Nonetheless, patterns of pressure and capacity differed across the two states. Most principals in the Maryland schools felt threatened by the school's status due to envisioned job loss and district and state surveillance while such heightened sense of threat did not surface among the Kentucky principals to the same degree. At the same time, the seven Maryland schools were lower-capacity schools compared to the four Kentucky schools, both subjectively in teachers' perceptions of social capacities and objectively in terms of teacher turn-over and work experience.

Relative to the Kentucky schools, Maryland schools' responses were molded in a combination of high anxiety among administrators, low levels of concern among many teachers due to only mild pressure and low meaningfulness of accountability goals, and low organizational capacity, compounded by the tendency of the two Maryland districts primarily affected by state reconstitution to direct school improvement with mandates and prescriptive programs. Principals reacted with a tightening of internal managerial control through increasing supervision, mandating observable instructional behaviors that staged compliance, suppressing dissent, orchestrating principal-directed meetings, etc. In the Kentucky schools, probation was an altogether less excited affair for both administration and teachers. Relative to the studied Maryland schools, less anxious administrators dealt with higher-capacity faculties whose training had accumulated in the more widespread knowledge of the unique instructional features of the state's accountability system. Administrators in the Kentucky schools stressed continuity, probation contributed to a heightened search for additional programs, projects, and external funding and a more intense effort of curriculum alignment supported by the Highly Skilled Educator. Less district and state control enhanced the schools' flexibility in this endeavor. But because it was coupled with more skepticism about the valence of external performance goals, it also resulted in a overall lower concern in the four Kentucky schools for probation. As in Maryland schools, the Kentucky schools' probation was not the triggering event for the thorough evaluation and reflection on daily curriculum.

5. The Persistent Gap between Performance Expectations and Classroom Reality

Although majorities of teachers across the 11 schools stated they had the requisite skills to teach according to the performance expectations of their accountability systems, classroom observations showed that teachers rarely taught according to these expectations. Many teachers' lessons were not adjusted to the pedagogy emphasized by the core assessments in either state. Higher-order thinking, problem solving, metacognition, extended dialogue, discussion of solutions, etc. were rare features in the observed lessons. In many lessons, little attention was paid to intellectual content and instructional intensity. In some classrooms, students were given the opportunity to write, to work in groups, and to make presentations, but often the scaffolding of cognitive processes was missing. While a number of lessons were solid on a basic level, many more lessons lacked coherence and quite a number were instructionally poor. Given the apparent gap between external performance expectations of the state accountability systems and the instructional reality of observed classrooms, and given the additional pressure that probation lends to these external expectations, why is it that teachers take so little heed and why is it that so many of them believe that things are the best they can be as far as their own performance is concerned? That is, why do the high performance expectations of the two state systems not provide greater challenges for teachers to make their instruction more intense and intellectually complex? Our study found a number of reasons. First of all, the assessments used by the states held little meaning for many teachers as adequate measurements of their own performance. Instead they were seen by many as unrealistic, unfair, and invalid. Constructed on a cognitive level that resulted in

70 to 90 percent of their students failing these assessments year after year, the assessments were unconnected to the daily flow of instruction. This was more so the case in Maryland where the MSPAP is decidedly more performance-based and less tied to a subject-based core curriculum. For some teachers, the accountability system did not provide a bridge between the ideal of more cognitively complex and intellectually rigorous instruction and the perceived need to teach basic skills to *their* students. In Maryland, this disconnect was reinforced by the presence of a basic skills test in middle schools that students needed to pass by the time they graduate from high school.

But many teachers did not perceive the gap between their own instruction and that envisioned by the assessments in either state as all that wide. They believed they had in fact aligned their teaching to the demands of the system by having extended time for writing and group work, by drilling test vocabulary words and practicing test-specific writing formats, and by following district-adopted curricula and programs (in the case of Maryland) or attempting to cover as much of the state core curriculum as possible (in the case of Kentucky). For these teachers, the reform task demanded by state standards and assessments did not amount to an intellectual upgrading of their teaching, but was interpreted as a more simplified and trivial incorporation of discrete instructional activities into their regular teaching style. For teachers who valued high test scores for primarily extrinsic reasons, that is, as a way to exit probation and not as a gauge of one's own performance, such a short route to maximizing scores made sense. Organizational improvement strategies selected by the schools were reflective of the same approach. For the most part, teachers were confronted with new programs and projects whose alignment with the assessments they accepted as an act of faith. They were asked to implement discrete and generic test attack strategies, writing formats, etc., were prodded to demonstrate compliance with instructional surface structures (e.g., warm-up phases, posting of test vocabulary and lesson objectives, table group seating), or were directed to align the content of their curriculum to the state's core content.

In the lesson debriefing interviews, lesson analysis was not an easy task for many observed teachers. While analyzing student behavior came more easily, self-critical reflection on one's own instruction was more halting, and a technical vocabulary of lesson analysis was often not evident. Many teachers did not hold their instruction to academically rigorous standards, but were not aware of this. When students were under control, were on task, and seemed to have some comprehension of the lesson content, many teachers felt comfortable with their lesson. Keeping control of one's classroom, making students work, and directing their attention to the learning goals of the lesson were not givens in the environments of the 11 schools, but entailed visible effort in many classrooms. The importance of ambitious instructional and learning goals of the accountability system paled in the face of these daily challenges.

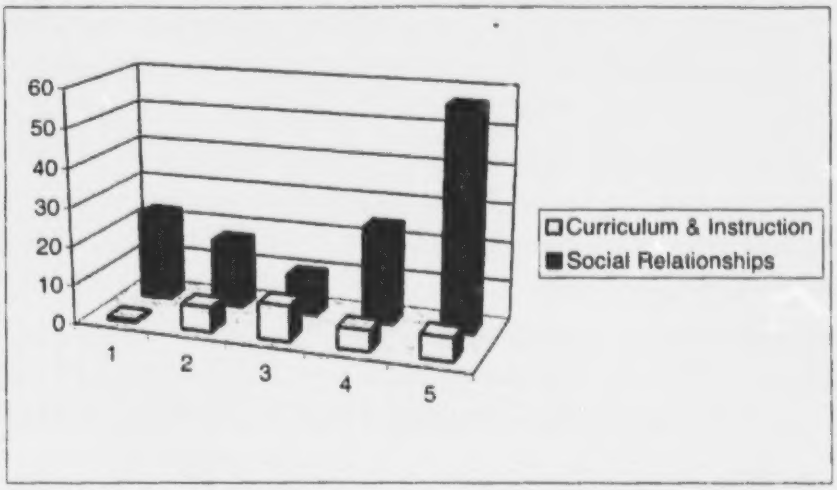
It was not that teachers rejected these goals; rather, they were either not aware of the wide gap between their instruction and the expectations of the accountability system or if they were aware of the gap they did not know how to bridge it. Apparently, the existence of high external expectations coupled with the pressures of probation were not sufficient to bring about such awareness and knowledge. A process of internalization is needed in which schools develop meaningful goals in light of real student work from the bottom up. In this process of school-internal accountability, state standards and realistic accountability goals frame schools' intermediate steps of improvement. Both official goals and teachers' performance need to be up for discussion. Surface compliance then would give way to an active search for performance shortcomings and solutions. Considering many teachers' unawareness of performance shortcomings, this process of internal accountability would have to be a social, school-wide process in which administrators and higher performing colleagues exert mild pressure on, and impart skills to lower performing colleagues. As we have seen, such a process was preempted in the Maryland schools – individually, by the lack of meaning attributed to accountability goals particularly among more motivated teachers and, organizationally, by rigidification tendencies that weakened organizational learning. In the four Kentucky schools, where administrators and teachers felt under less pressure and were at the same time even more skeptical about the accountability goals, probation reinforced traditional approaches to school improvement resulting in more programs, more projects, more staff development, but not in a process of internal accountability that subjected daily classroom instruction to collegial scrutiny.

The school improvement plans written in the two states according to state-provided templates are a good indicator of this insufficiently internalized approach to school accountability. The plans, helpful as they were as organizing devices in the internal management and in the external monitoring of some schools, were neither strategic, nor fine-grained enough to guide an internal accountability process. If they were strategic, they would abstain from undue comprehensiveness and the listing of large numbers of new programs, projects, grants, and training opportunities. Instead, they would highlight the schools' main problems that were internally controllable and prioritize the main steps the school would have taken in a given year. If they were fine-grained, they would spell out a process of internal inquiry into classroom instruction and bridge between present instructional performance and ambitious goals. Such a fine-grained approach is necessary in accountability systems that press teachers to change their pedagogy, as both the Maryland and Kentucky assessments aim to do. In such systems, "alignment" entails a more complex process that moves beyond a concern for coverage, frequency of activities, and discrete skills learned in staff development workshops.

6. Mismatch of Priorities

The 11 schools on probation selected for the study, to varying degrees, were hard and challenging work environments that educated large numbers of students considered at risk. In addition, many of the 11 schools faced instability due to high teacher and administrator turn-over and fairly large proportions of inexperienced teachers. It is the avowed strength of high-stakes accountability systems that the presence of standards and assessments coupled with the pressures of sanctions provide the impetus for those schools to focus on student achievement and instruction. In fact, a school becomes probationary because of insufficient student achievement. In both the Maryland and Kentucky systems, the centrality of instruction was accentuated due to the states' press for performance-based pedagogy. Teachers' own priorities for school improvement speak a different language. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the three most critical areas for school improvement out of a list of 21. Improving student discipline and stabilizing teacher motivation and commitment were considered by far more important tasks than work on instructional methods or pedagogy. Thus, concern for social aspects of schooling prevailed over instructional ones (see Figure VII.1). Accountability system demands and teacher needs in the 11 schools on probation were incongruent and distant from each other. When accountability systems called for student achievement, teachers answered back with an entreaty for baseline stabilization of their schools, needs that had less to do with teacher performance and more to with organizational capacity building.

Figure VII.1 – Perceived Critical Areas for School



The number is in percentage

Legend

Curriculum and Instruction	*Social relationships*
1. New pedagogical theory	1. Motivation of teachers
2. Child psychology	2. Stabilizing faculty turn-over
3. New instructional methods	3. Sprit of the school
4. Performance-based pedagogy	4. Respect for teachers
5. New instruction materials	5. Student discipline

7. Generalized Policy Effect or Varied Local Capacities

Research on effective schools has shown time and again that performance differences between schools operating under similar circumstances can be quite large. Organizational and instructional characteristics of schools that perform highly under very challenging circumstances have been documented. Policy makers and public voices demand to no longer tolerate "failing public schools" and to lift the performance of the laggards up to the level of the most effective schools. Pointing to the presumably disappointing results of earlier redistributive policies, advocates of accountability policies claim that standards accompanied with pressures have the potential of closing this performance gap. Some, citing lack of will as the primary culprit of underperformance, believe the job can be done without much infusion of new resources. Others trust that a combination of sanctions and resources will raise educators' will and capacity.

We do not intend to generalize the findings of our study beyond the 11 focal schools, though the reading of a hundred or so school improvement plans and a look at test score data from one state, Maryland, helped us reach beyond the case studies. But we want to take up the varied policy claims in light of lessons learned from the study. Since we do not have state achievement data from Kentucky because of design discontinuities in that state, we will base our discussion on the Maryland case. In Maryland, probation does not coincide with large test score gains of schools so designated. Gains are fairly flat. Many schools, at least initially, managed to reverse their decline and keep up with the state as a whole. The performance gap between probation schools and the state as a whole was wide, and although growth rates were higher for probation schools than for the state as a whole, schools on probation were not closing the gap rapidly. Furthermore, responses to probation (i.e. reconstitution-eligibility) varied widely among schools and over the years. Some schools on probation posted large gains while others remained flat or even declined.

Data from the focal schools sheds some light on these patterns. Many teachers in the studied schools on probation in Maryland (as in Kentucky) experienced the status as mild pressure, did not consider the accountability system as a meaningful way to evaluate them, and worked in schools of varied social capacity and instructional know-how.

While schools differed according to their capacity, pressures and meanings applied to them regardless of site variation. But in these two components, the examined probation policies were weak, with the exception of principals in Maryland who experienced strong pressure, but were confronted with a rather unconcerned staff. As was previously mentioned, judging from the 11 focal cases, schools' reaction to probation can be best explained through a combination of mild external pressure and local capacities and capacity building absent a strong valuing of the accountability system. Pressure varied dependent on the determination and leadership skill of the principal. If the principal did not amplify external pressure in his or her school, probation was largely ignored. Thus, the reaction of schools to probation was ultimately a matter of local capacity and not common response due to policy. The most important capacities across the studied schools in Maryland were the principals' determined and supportive leadership, the strength of collegial relationships, the (perceived) skill of one's colleagues, and the availability of skillful specialists who can influence instruction. With pressure coming from the principal and the discomfort generated by probation, highly motivated teachers became involved regardless of their skepticism about the accountability system. None of these factors are new or come as a surprise. However, the prevalence of these factors also means that schools that have weak principals or principal turnover, suffer from fragmented and unsupportive faculty relationships, and cannot benefit from the services of skillful specialists do not respond to probation positively.

8. Improving Probation Policies

How could probation policies be improved? One could argue for a tightening of pressure, enhancement of meaning, and investment in capacity. As to the first, some external pressure is needed. Given the large performance gap between external expectations and observed instruction, teachers in the eleven schools on probation showed a conspicuous disinclination to assess themselves critically. But increased pressure may sap teachers' job commitment to the already stigmatized school. In the 11 schools, job commitment was precarious, particularly in the seven Maryland schools where teachers had the option to exit easily. In the Maryland schools, teacher turn-over reached a level at which it is no longer possible to argue that the "right" teachers, i.e. those that are presumably less willing to work hard, are leaving. Although our data is not conclusive as to the quality of the ones who have already left, we have more information on those that are planning to leave.

If the policy was working properly, one would expect teachers with higher performance motivation and teachers in moving schools to have higher job commitment. But this is not so. Means in job commitment for these teacher groups were not higher than for other groups that were less positively inclined towards school improvement. Thus, higher and lower motivated teachers were just as likely to leave their school. Quantitative and qualitative data support each other in this regard. For those that said they were uncertain or ready to leave, probation was the prime reason across the four Kentucky schools while in the Maryland schools prime reasons were exit options and "sinking ship" feelings. Increasing pressure due to probation would in all likelihood reinforce these sentiments and exacerbate the schools' already formidable instability. It is quite likely in light of our data that a drain of higher qualified teachers – a widely feared negative consequence of probation – may not have happened in the 11 schools exactly because probation pressures had heretofore been rather benign. Moreover, additional pressure may encourage more organizational rigidity and forestall the kinds of organizational learning processes that are necessary for more complex pedagogy to take root.

A second strategy to improve probation policy is enhancing the meaning teachers attach to the accountability system. Contrary to assurances by policy makers and high-level administrators that their accountability system is fair, this is not a belief that was shared by many teachers in these schools that struggled with extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Designs need to be adjusted so that more teachers in these schools feel evaluated fairly. Particularly in the Maryland and Kentucky cases, where the assessments are highly complex and ambitious, bridging mechanisms need to be found that help teachers make sense of goals and standards. Bridging could be facilitated by pegging the tests to varied proficiency levels and by providing an instructional technology that shows teachers how to teach in an intellectually stimulating way adjusted to the lower proficiency levels they encounter in their students. For the most part, the 11 schools show that clear standards and pressures alone do not make teachers into self-directed developers of instructional techniques. Rather, standards have to be meaningful and technologies need to be developed that teachers can then adapt to specific student proficiency levels. Processes of organizational learning and internal accountability help teachers deal with the tension between high external performance expectations and performance realities of their students. More meaningful accountability would help teachers make the connection between test scores and their own performance and would increase teachers' job commitment to their school despite the school's probationary status.

Investment in school capacity is key for the success of probation policies if findings from this study are an indication of the behavior of larger numbers of schools. Foremost, any positive movement we observed in the eleven schools had to do with either individual or social capacities available at the schools or provided to the school by external agencies. Teacher responses, as well, strongly pointed to the connection between performance motivation as a result of probation and social capacities (principal leadership, collegiality, skills of colleagues) at their work place. A similar relationship holds for job commitment. Level of school capacity is the factor that best explains the variation in individual and organizational responses to probation.

Moreover, many of the schools lacked the kind of baseline stability that is necessary for a cumulative process of school improvement. Without this stabilization, the school, now held accountable as a whole organization in both accountability systems by way of year-to-year snapshots, can hardly be considered the unit responsible for its performance and the strategic actor in school improvement. Some of the Maryland schools had exchanged almost their entire personnel between the time we began our study to the time we ended it. Some of the Kentucky schools saw a dramatic deterioration of their social indicators (i.e., free or reduced lunch participation) while they declined. Performance trends and improvement continuities that accountability systems have constructed for whole organizations become fictitious under these circumstances.

According to evidence for this study, it is unlikely that the language of sanctions could become acceptable and fruitful without accompanying capacity building. But beyond sanctions and capacity, accountability systems, particularly those that have advanced an ambitious pedagogical agenda, need to evolve into systems that can be embraced as fair and realistic by those that work under challenging conditions and find themselves, hopefully temporarily, on the losing side. Accountability systems that challenge teachers not only to intensify and align their instruction in traditional ways, but also to learn new pedagogy and to teach in a new intellectual style rely on a meaningful connection between their standards, goals, and visions and the teacher as learner.

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

Schools on Probation

in the States of Maryland and Kentucky

VOLUME III

BY
HEINRICH MINTROP

WITH
KIM CURTIS
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LEA PLUT-PREGELJ
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TECHNICAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO
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THE EFFECT OF RECONSTITUTION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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PART VIII. SELECTED CASE STUDIES

SCHOOL A

by Heinrich Mintrop

School A is located in a suburban county in a large East Coast metropolitan area. African Americans, making up the great majority of the population in this county, have been moving here in larger numbers since the seventies from the inner city core. As more affluent and more upwardly mobile families have moved further out and away from the urban core, older people remained, and poorer people, taking advantage of the modest housing costs, moved in, bringing with them the social problems of the city: poverty, crime, single-parent families, unskilled labor, and a low educational level. The school is surrounded by verdant hills, tree-lined streets, and modest brick homes. There is a shopping strip nearby that is in parts lively and in parts abandoned by businesses. A supermarket, an array of fast-food outlets, and car-related stores dot the scene. The area has the unadorned and worn look of a once far-away suburb turned edge-city. A large military base several miles away supplies customers and life to the neighborhood.

The great majority of the students attending School A were bused in from several distinct neighborhoods, among them the military base, the school's neighborhood, and neighborhoods closer to the city with a large stock of apartment buildings that tend to be occupied by lower socioeconomic strata. Of the 850 students attending the school, about 90 percent were African

American. Reflecting the change in the cultural heritage of the community that had occurred from the early sixties onwards when the school was built, the school adopted the name of a prominent African American in 1993. The district has been operating under a court-ordered desegregation (and busing) plan that left little room for school choice. There seemed to be little competition among public schools for students. The county's extensive magnet school program was not mentioned by School A as a strong competitor. According to parents and teachers, parents were sending their children willingly to School A, though the reputation of the school in the community was not one of exceptional excellence.

On the whole, parents were not much involved in the affairs of the school. The PTSA membership was very small. About a hundred families were attracted to the year-end awards assembly. About 15 parents (out of a student body of more than 800 students) showed up for a PTSA meeting that was attended by the research team. At that meeting the declining performance scores of the school were discussed as a prime agenda item. Parents voiced concern, but the low performance scores of the school were not attributed to the work of the faculty; rather, in the views of some parents present at that meeting, it reflected irresponsible parenting of a small group of parents and the unusual format of the state's performance-based achievement test. Parents questioned whether the performance-based test (MSPAP) did not divert too much attention from the study of basic skills, an emphasis that made eminent sense to some of the parents and that reverberated with parents' own experience of a "good education." Parents were also hoping that reconstitution-eligibility would increase the availability of tutoring for children with learning difficulties.

As an indicator of the socioeconomic status of the student body, about half of the school's students qualified for free and reduced lunch meals. This is fairly high compared with the state overall, but it is below the median of roughly seventy percent for all reconstitution-eligible schools in the state. A fairly high number of students were enrolled in the school's special education program (between 70 and 90 students out of roughly 850 varying by school year). The school lost about one fifth to one sixth of its student population over the year, a rate that was lower than that of many other RE schools where mobility rates can exceed 50 percent. Thus, School A had to deal with a fairly high educational load, but as compared to a truly inner-city milieu, School A's educational load was lower. However, teachers in the school repeatedly mentioned that new waves of students brought with them an ever-increasing host of problems associated with the inner-city. Teachers who had been at the school for years reported a deterioration in students' readiness to learn.

The District

The school is housed in a suburban school district serving 128,000 students, large by national standards. The district borders on a large city. Schools within the inner suburban belt around the city are distinctly urban in character. When the study began, the district was subdivided into several clusters that were headed by area superintendents who were simultaneously principals of the high schools that anchor the clusters. However, contrary to this organizational blueprint, the school received a large proportion of its population from outside the cluster, making the intended articulation between elementary, middle and high schools a less likely occurrence. A representative of the area superintendent, responsible for all middle and elementary schools in the cluster, was the liaison with the school. But it did not seem that he substantially intervened in the affairs of the school. Towards the conclusion of our data collection in the 1999/2000 school year, a new superintendent arrived and replaced the cluster organization with a layer of regional directors. District reorganization, the ending of mandatory busing, and the re-zoning of catchment areas all contributed to shifts in student populations from year to year.

An official district curriculum regulated instruction in all subjects. This curriculum incorporated the state learning outcomes that are mandatory for schools or local districts. Up until the advent of accountability, no specific instructional programs were mandated by either the state or the district. Thus, the school operated fairly autonomously. Teachers and administrators repeatedly mentioned district subject matter departments and the office for school improvement and accountability, the latter responsible for overseeing the school's probationary status, as important sources for assistance, but also as agencies mandating specific actions especially in the wake of the school's recent reconstitution-eligibility status. Up until the last year of data collection, the school had not received any large-scale external grants that substantially shaped its program. A model comprehensive program, funding one FTE position through poverty-related moneys, allowed the school to run an extensive field experience-based learning program. This program served as a launching pad for the comprehensive school reform design (CSRD) that the school was mandated by the district to select in the beginning of the 1999/2000 school year. School A selected the project "Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound" that promised to be a good match with what the school was already doing.

Internal Stability of the School

Organizations are made up of people that interrelate with each other in patterned ways. Formal rules, stability in leadership, personnel acting out the unwritten norms of the group, and the efforts of the group to socialize new members help maintain the continuity of the organization and make deliberate and sustained change possible. At School A, this kind of stability was tenuous. Naturally, in a school with only two grade levels (seventh and eighth grade) student turnover is high from year to year. The relatively high student mobility added to this flux.

In addition, boundary changes required the school to take in 80 additional eighth graders that came from other middle schools during the 1999/2000 school year. Though they had been at the school for only eight months, their performance was computed into the overall school performance score that, according to the state accountability agency, measures year-to-year performance changes of the adults in the school.

As for the adults in the school, the organization was in flux as well. From 1995 to 2000, the school had four different principals. From 1998 to 19999, the school saw the replacement of the entire administrative team. Faculty turnover produced a curious seniority pattern. Groups of very novice and very senior teachers predominated in the faculty. In the 1997/98 school year for example, 23 teachers had between zero and five years of experience, 24 teachers had more than 16 years of experience while only 12 teachers had accrued between five and 15 years of experience. Thus, the group that many reformers consider crucial in school improvement due to its desirable combination of expertise and stamina was under-represented at School A. This is not to say, however, that School A did not benefit from the activities of younger faculty members. But often the newer teachers were overwhelmed by the challenge of covering the curriculum and maintaining classroom discipline. The pattern of seniority, quite common in other troubled schools and, one should add, in the district as a whole, was a result of many young teachers transferring out of the school once they received their initial training. Tenure rules (certification, end of probationary status) allowed them to move on to presumably less stressful assignments. Hence, the school had to rely on a large number of novice teachers with fairly low commitment to the organization.

In addition, some of these novice teachers were not fully certified. In the 1997/98 school year, about 10 percent of the faculty was not fully certified, a percentage below the district average. In the 1998/99 school year, the number of non-tenured teachers had risen to about 30 out of a faculty of 59, hence to about half of the faculty. Throughout the course of the 1998/99 and 1999/2000 school years, the school was unable to fill all its positions with regular teachers. Several members of the staff either quit mid-year or went on leave, among them the testing coordinator. Overall, 10 positions were in flux during the 1998/99 school year and had to be staffed by long-term or day-to-day substitutes. In the 1999/2000 school year, that number rose to 13 classrooms without a stable teacher, among them four Mathematics positions, which presumably had a direct negative impact on the school's test scores. Many of these classes were staffed by a stream of teachers lasting but a short while in their assignments. More seasoned teachers at the site felt they were losing track of "who was a teacher in the school."

When turnover of adults in the school becomes rapid, the notion of a school on probation that assumes responsibility for past performance deficiencies and strives to improve over a period of several years becomes obsolete. In School A, only 19 out of 65 certificated personnel that were working at the site at the end of the 1999/00 school year were present when the school was identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1998. A number of those teachers indicated their desire to leave the school at the end of the school year. Moreover, since that time the school had been administered by two distinct administrative teams. Thus in School A, there was very little continuity in personnel and leadership on which school improvement processes could build.

This situation had potentially grave impact on the chances of the school to increase its test scores. It was a concern for the current leadership of the school that high numbers of inexperienced teachers would force the school to concentrate on basic mastery when an ambitious upgrading of classroom instruction was called for. Given that each year more than half of the student population is new to the school and that over the course of the two years of data collection not even a third of the faculty remained, with well over half of the adults arriving new in the building each year, comparing year-to-year performance of the organization inhered a fictional element for School A. For these kinds of comparisons assume the continuity of a stable group of faculty striving to improve the school from year to year, a continuity that eluded School A.

Presumably, both internal and external factors influenced the stability of the school. Obviously, the school had no control over the salary structure of the district which made it less competitive compared to other more affluent districts in the area that could afford to pay higher salaries to their teachers. The school also had no control over a labor market that was characterized by teacher shortages and openings at less challenging and more desirable schools, presumably luring qualified applicants away from schools in trouble. But the school had some control over its internal climate. In interviews conducted in the midst of a large exodus of faculty from School A at the end of the 1997/98 school year, exiting faculty stressed lack of safety, lack of student discipline, and lack of support by the administration especially in matters of student discipline, rather than salary or other career opportunities, as key reasons for leaving. A climate survey conducted by the faculty in the middle of the 1999/2000 school year revealed very low morale and immense dissatisfaction with the leadership of the principal among the faculty. If commitment to the organization can be in parts internally influenced, School A did not do a good job.

The School Organization

School A is housed in a two-story brick building that is nestled in the green and hilly terrain of its suburban environs. The building has about 50 classrooms arrayed in a quadrant, a music department, a special education department, a room for creative arts and industrial arts, a sizable gymnasium, a computer lab that lacked state of the art equipment, a library with a largely worn collection of books, and several smaller offices for administration and specialized services. A large space in the center of the second floor serves as both cafeteria and auditorium. The eighth grade occupied the first floor and the seventh grade occupied the second floor which is also the floor for the main entrance.

A visitor to the building during the 1998/99 school year would observe a clean, fairly well maintained, not too crowded building, well lit for the most part. Most of the classrooms appeared to be pleasant learning environments, though a few were in need of major overhaul. Students were for the most part friendly to visitors, though teasing and cursing in the hallways seemed quite frequent among students themselves. Observed interaction between teachers and students was for the most part relaxed and friendly when students passed by teachers' classrooms or hallway monitoring stations, but could be strained when teachers escorted their classes through the hallways to lunch, lockers, or other destinations.

The 850 students were subdivided into six houses that were taught by six teams of classroom teachers and a creative arts team. Members of the teams were located in proximity to each other which facilitated contact among teachers and students in the houses. Contact and collaboration was also facilitated by common planning periods for the teams. Though tracking was not prominently featured by the school, for example the school did not have a featured honors program, ability grouping occurred. In some houses and teams, strong learners predominated while other teams took in larger numbers of slow learners and special education students. But such grouping differentials seemed to be informal arrangements.

School A operated with one principal and two vice principals, each responsible for one grade level. The administration was primarily responsible for all cases of disciplinary infractions that could not be handled by teachers in the classroom. Two guidance counselors and a peer mediation specialist concerned themselves with conflicts among students and discipline problems below the level of punishment. In addition, the school ran an in-house suspension room. Five special education teachers were responsible for about 70 to 90 students (numbers varying from year to year). Several other support staff, such as an attendance clerk, school nurse, security guards, etc. supported the school's operation. One teacher on released time organized an extensive field trip program that supplemented the school's instructional program, and another coordinated the organization of testing. Partly as a result of the school's probationary status, the school received three new positions in the 1998/99 school year, a master/mentor teacher who was to concentrate on novice teachers, a specialist who was to concentrate on school improvement issues, and a character education teacher who left after one school year and whose position was not filled again. Reflecting the ethnic make-up of the school, in the 1998/99 school year more than two-thirds of the faculty was African American, a conspicuous number of them young men. That number declined during the following school year.

When many middle schools in the district adopted magnet programs, School A maintained its comprehensive program. Ordinarily during their regular school day, students took a class of English and in most houses an additional class of reading. Math, social studies, science, and P.E. or a class in the creative arts complemented the program. In addition, students had the option of taking a foreign language elective. Except for the model comprehensive program which was responsible for educational field trips, the school did not profile unique programmatic features. After-school activities were notoriously difficult to organize in schools where most students were bused.

School Performance

School A was identified as reconstitution-eligible in the spring of 1998. By that time, the school had experienced a steady decline in its performance as measured by the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program. From 1994/95 to 1996/97, MSPAP reading scores declined from 13 percent to 10 percent of School A students performing at the satisfactory level. Math scores declined starkly from 27.7 percent to 14.1 percent during the same period. In writing, scores fluctuated from roughly 26 percent to 23 percent to 28 percent in the 1996/97 school year. Overall scores on the Maryland Functional Test declined slightly in all areas during this period. Attendance tended to approximate the state's expectation in the first months of the year, but then tended to decline below 90 percent towards the end of the school year. The curriculum audit by the state in 1998 found that, among other things, the school needed a tightening up of lesson planning and a fundamental reshaping of instructional formats in the direction of more performance-based pedagogy.

Table 1 - Percentage of School A Students Scoring "Satisfactory" or Better on MSPAP

	1994	1997	1998	1999	2000
Reading	8.6	10.6	5.9	10.3	9.3
Mathematics	12.5	14.9	16.2	15.8	14.2

At the time School A was designated reconstitution-eligible, student discipline was a serious problem. Up until the spring of the 1997/98 school year, the faculty had written a total of 791 discipline referrals, statistically almost one referral per student. The school carried out 180 suspensions affecting about 14 percent of the student population with the last suspension-prone quarter of the school year still outstanding. In 1996/97, roughly a quarter of the students were suspended. Veteran teachers reported that discipline had been a problem in the school for a long time. One informant described how teachers in previous years had sheltered themselves from the disruptions in the hallways by keeping their doors shut and by "praying" for better times. Thus, establishing and maintaining student discipline was a key issue for improvement at School A.

Year I: The School Just Identified

At the time the reconstitution verdict reached School A in the spring of 1998, the school was led by an inexperienced team of administrators who were new to the task of running a school. They lacked the skills to deal with School A's difficult student body. In February of 1998, the state announced that the school would become "reconstitution-eligible." The research team gained access to the school in April when the school had already dealt with the first shock that the new status of probation entailed. Our first contact was with the main office. It was filled with students and parents who demanded service or just sat around. The two secretaries asked many of the students to move on to their classes, but often to no avail. Phones rang, the school's intercom system blared, and walkie-talkies placed on the secretaries' desks demanded attention. Teachers entered the office and looked for papers on the secretaries' desks or joined students in vying for the secretaries' attention. Confusion and disorganization reigned.

We began to observe faculty and school-based management team (SBMT) meetings and to conduct interviews with administrators and teachers, initially focusing on teachers highly involved in the affairs of the school. Both these teachers and the principal accepted the state's verdict as beyond their control and expressed relief that local and state authorities were de-emphasizing the punitiveness of the measure. They hoped that reconstitution-eligibility might be a chance for the school to pull together and receive long-awaited help. The principal assured, "The superintendent told me when he hired me that he wasn't pleased with the academic performance of the school. I can make a difference. Give me what I need and I can make a difference" (A-1). Several teachers as well felt sure that the school would successfully master the challenge and improve with right kind of support:

> I was optimistic because I thought this was an opportunity... to get the resources we need. I thought that we would finally get the lower class sizes that we had been promised.(A-6)
>
> You know, they make it seem like when the school gets reconstitution eligible, people want to think like, "We don't need help." We've been crying for help for years, you know, it's just, I've always said, the only thing that bothers, I think bothers me, I think bothers other teachers is that to get the help that you've been asking for, something negative has to happen. You can't just ask for the help when you need it. (...) So, do I feel we can rise out of this? Sure. I mean, we're capable. We have the skills to rise out of it, given what we've been asking for all along. (A-2)

The immediate challenge for the principal, however, was to understand the external demands that the new mandates imposed on the school. Foremost, upon identification the school had to design and write a substantial school improvement plan (called the transition plan) based on a template furnished by district administrators. The plan had to be compiled within two months and submitted to the state board of education for approval. The principal assembled a small group of four to five teachers, at least one of them on release time, who she felt had the ability to write such a plan. This was an unusual and enormous task for the writing team, particularly since the principal was new to the building. In this initial stage, reconstitution consisted of the challenge to compile a plan that could meet approval, first by local officials and then by the state board. This became the overriding concern for the administration and participating teachers. While the designers of the plan conversed with other faculty about various elements of the plan, no systematic effort was launched to involve faculty on a broad scale. The school managed to write a plan that won praise from local administrators, but internally it was introduced to the SBMT as a *fait accompli*. No broad based discussion about the plan among faculty ensued. In fact, SBMT members were invited to view the plan in the principal's office while teachers did not receive a copy of the plan until the following school year.

While the principal and her small core of teachers concentrated on designing steps for school improvement, regular school operations slowly deteriorated, primarily due to mounting discipline problems. During class periods the halls were filled with roaming students. Some teachers complained about being threatened by students and being unable to keep student disruptions and violent behavior under control. In informal short response interviews, teachers blamed the inexperience of their administrators for this sorry state of affairs. Some teachers lamented that the principal's leadership style was erratic and favored students. The principal, however, seemed undaunted and somewhat detached from all of this turmoil. In her own words, she saw herself as a strong manager of adults and a caring maternal figure of children. She was working closely with a small cadre of committed teachers and did not notice, or did not acknowledge, that parts of her faculty were grumbling and dispirited. The situation, however, did not result in open conflict between faculty and administration, nor were the shortcomings of the school publicly aired. It is possible that traditional norms of hierarchical control made it unlikely that faculty would get more outspoken about their situation. It is also possible that the new probationary status had rattled the faculty's confidence. After all, reconstitution-eligibility was novel in the county and the little knowledge the school had about the requirements of reconstitution was concentrated in the principal.

Towards the end of the school year, morale was low, expectations for performance improvement had evaporated, and dissension had reached the administrative team. One of the vice principals voiced her helplessness and her disapproval of the principal's lack of skill as a disciplinarian, "The principal here, she sets the tone for both myself and the other vice principal, we can only reinforce what she says when the teachers come to us. The teachers here are very frustrated because they don't feel we have a strong enough discipline program in place. I concur with that" (A-4).

The school year ended with a "mass exodus" of slightly less than half the staff, most of them seasoned teachers, among them a large number of science teachers credentialed in their field, some highly involved teachers, and at least one plan writer. Most teachers who volunteered for exit interviews were beginning teachers. As was mentioned above, prevalent reasons for their leaving were lack of student discipline and an inept administration. Better career options elsewhere were mentioned as well, but a few interviewees expressed their desire to stay if it wasn't for the school's troubled state. Reconstitution was mentioned, but paled in the face of problems these exiting teachers faced in their classrooms everyday. One teacher who chose to stay commented about her leaving colleagues, "Nobody wants to be associated with a sinking ship."

Did reconstitution-eligibility elicit a productive response from the organization? Clearly, in Year I of probation crisis in School A was exacerbated. "Reconstitution" from the beginning was an affair delegated to an inexperienced principal who relied on her own leadership prerogatives and a small group of capable teachers who rallied around her. Time could not be wasted in meeting the requirements of the accountability system. Deepening discipline problems were not taken up as collective challenge, but responsibility rested with the administration; even within the administration itself, fingers pointed at the principal. As the school year came to an end, hope of improvement gave way to expectations of further deterioration. Morale sank and dissent arose, though it did not bring about an open challenge. Eventually dissension spread to the administrative team while top-down operations rigidified. School A did not learn in this situation. Probation, coupled with principal leadership that was perceived as weak, resulted in fragmentation and partial dissolution. In the end, the organization lost both its leadership and a good portion of its seasoned faculty.

This state of affairs was reflected in the school's performance scores the following year. Contrary to the optimistic expectation of a small group of activists, the school's performance declined again. In reading the scores declined from 10.1 percent to 5.9 percent of the students performing on a satisfactory level, in social studies from 19.8 percent to 12.6 percent, in writing from 28.4 percent to 16.6 percent, and in language use from 34.2 percent to 20.4 percent. Scores in math and science either remained the same or improved slightly.

Year II: A New Beginning

In the following school year, the district appointed a new principal to the school, an African American woman of middle age, like the previous principal. The new principal had a track record of having previously achieved performance improvements in a school similar to School A that had been operating under a local district "alert" status. Upon her request, she was allowed to assemble her own administrative team that she brought with her to the school: two assistant principals, a master teacher, and a coordinator for school improvement activities whose position was funded out of the local reconstitution budget. The school began Year II of probation with a large number of new teachers. About 30 of the 58 teachers were non-tenured. Senior teachers pointed out that after the prior year's mass exodus, the staff who remained presumably knew the situation of the school and really wanted to be there. On the other hand, the number of inexperienced teachers, already high the previous year, had increased again.

Reaction to Probationary Status

During the early part of the 1998/99 school year, about a fourth of the faculty was interviewed. The view prevailed in these interviews that reconstitution was not a real threat. Teachers felt confident about their personal future. "There is always a place for a competent teacher," one teacher said. They called the state's "bluff" or "scare tactics. "Let the state come and take over, and then we'll see if they can do it better," was a sentiment echoed in many interviews. But at the same time, teachers did concede that the state was right to point out performance deficiencies. Although the fairness of the accountability process was doubted on account that "the MSPAP is too hard for our students, "and that teachers "are doing the best [they] can, given what [they] are up against," most teachers accepted responsibility for improvements, though at the same time they complained that the state put too much "blame" on teachers. Teachers expressed willingness to contribute to the school's success, though they rarely volunteered with concrete suggestions for their own classrooms.

Those new teachers who were interviewed were not sure what reconstitution-eligibility entailed. They felt absorbed by the day-to-day challenges of managing students and instruction. The more seasoned teachers, though more astute about whole-school affairs, pointed to their students when asked why they chose to stay. Some expressed commitment explicitly to "this type of school," the "difficult" age group, or the community served by this middle school. Most teachers conveyed that they felt competent and that they therefore had something to offer to students and community. In no case was it fear of sanctions that motivated teachers to put out effort. Nor did it seem that the raising of test scores *per se* was of great importance to teachers. Rather, the school's probationary status was seen as a wake-up call to renew and reaffirm teachers' commitment to their students.

Optimism again prevailed in the school's second year of probation. As reasons for their optimism, teachers expressed hope that new determined action on the part of administration and faculty would improve discipline and that the new support which the school was receiving as a result of reconstitution would help the school along. During that school year the local district provided additional resources for two staff positions and extensive staff development to reconstitution-eligible schools.

The Principal's Leadership

The new principal for the 1998/99 school year was an educator with a professional background in business. She was steeped in the subject-matter of mathematics, seasoned by previous administrative assignments, and knowledgeable about the culture of the community. While she did not necessarily seek out her new assignment, she was at the same time undaunted by the challenge, given her previous record of success in the "Alert School." Her leadership style during this first year of her tenure at School A was decidedly top-down and focused on the managerial aspects of the school while dealing with the realm of curriculum and instruction was left to members of her team. Upon her arrival at the school, she forcefully took charge of the school, intervening in its daily affairs, challenging traditions, and establishing a highly visible presence in the building. She saw herself as an able administrator who had the wherewithal to create a safe and orderly environment for learning at the school.

The School Improvement Plan

When the new administrative team began its assignment at School A, it found a school improvement plan that had been put together under the previous administration. The plan therefore could not reflect the wisdom and ideas of the new team. Some members of the old writing team had already left by the time school started, and some more left during the new school year. As was mentioned, the school improvement plan had to be compiled under time pressure so that the staff as a whole was not familiar with its content. At a staff development day early in the year, the staff was finally handed a copy of the school improvement plan. The plan had been approved by the state board of education in the meantime and was thus considered a binding document although the school had a completely new administration, and about 40 percent of the teachers were new as well.

At a staff development session, the coordinator for the school improvement process wanted to familiarize staff with the plan's content and particularly sought to convey the plan's unique format of rational planning. To this end, groups of teachers were given assignments to search for the linkages between goals, needs assessments, activities, and responsibilities in various areas of school operations as they were described in the plan. The teams were given a worksheet that required them to fill in content and page numbers for the various categories and in the process to discover interrelationships among them. The team observed by the research team carried out the task with little luster. Finally one of the teachers took it upon herself to complete the worksheet. Her worksheet was subsequently copied and given to the rest of the group. The results of the group work were presented to the full faculty. At no time during the observed staff development session was there a discussion among faculty about the actual goals and ideas that they were expected to carry out. At this stage, the staff was expected to merely accept and understand what had been compiled by some of their colleagues and officially ratified. by the state.

If reactions at the meeting were any indication, teachers complied without grumbling, though the discussions were without life. Interestingly when the conversation of the faculty switched to individual students, teachers became animated. Talking about school problems through the lens of individual students made intuitive sense to them while the lens of statistics imposed by the quantitatively based accountability system seemed less relevant. Confirming observations from the meetings, one teacher who was instrumental in the planning remarked that it would take a mathematically inclined teacher to understand the data provided by the accountability system. Teachers did not seem to either have the skill or the interest to discover patterns in the data that might shed further light on the school's performance record.

In subsequent interviews, whenever inquiries were made as to know how familiar informants felt with the plan -- presumably the blueprint design for their improvement effort -- they pointed to the particular staff development day described above. But when asked about specifics, respondents in the interviews were rarely able to point to activities enumerated in the plan that pertained to them and their own classroom directly. Teachers did not own the plan, nor was it prominently featured by the new administration. Not surprisingly, the new team had its own ideas and voiced some misgivings about the plan, though parts of it were carried out over the year.

School A's improvement plan heavily emphasized curriculum and instruction, new technology, staff development, and the reliance on three new staff members funded by reconstitution funds who would take over new specialized functions. Echoing the state curriculum audit, the school planned to abide more stringently by daily lesson plans and official curricula. In all major test subjects, the plan promised in fairly general terms that teachers employ more performance-based instructional methods and tasks that encourage team work and higher-order thinking. Test practice and test simulation activities for both the functional or basic skills test and the performance-based test as well as the strengthening of holistic scoring skills for teachers featured prominently. Portfolios were to be maintained in language arts and math. Some specific activities were enumerated in the various curricular areas, such as "one writing prompt per week," the use of writing labs, science labs and monthly lab reports, as well as a geography unit and a number of field trips.

The school intended to strengthen its contact with parents through test-related home-packets, a parent newsletter, and immediate home calls in case of undue absences or tardies. Intensive counseling and home visits for students with repeat attendance problems were also envisioned in the plan. Attendance was also to be encouraged with awards and recognitions. An extensive staff development calendar listed 18 workshops. Topics were the use of technology, the middle school child, multiple intellingences, higher-order thinking, "Dimensions of Learning" (a review program of principles of student-centered pedagogy), student discipline, reading and writing across the curriculum, and scoring of test-related prompts.

It was curious how the planners chose to deal with student discipline. The topic appeared under language arts. In order to achieve its goal of having 70 percent of students scoring at the satisfactory level in reading and writing, the school suggested a strategy of reducing classroom disruption through teacher in-services on cooperative discipline and the use of a school-wide student management plan. These discipline-related activities were to be organized by the newly hired character education teacher. The somewhat inconspicuous treatment of the topic of student discipline in the plan contrasted remarkably with the observed situation of the school that was characterized by grave discipline problems. As a result, the school improvement plan proved to irrelevant for some key areas in which the school managed to make progress in the course of the subsequent school year.

Tackling Discipline

Although it was not a focus of the school improvement plan, discipline became the immediate focus of the new principal who did not loose time tackling the problem. At a faculty meeting early in the year, she introduced her plan. The plan involved a strict hall pass, escort, and lunch supervision system. When one of the teachers who had been at the school the previous year wanted to voice a concern with the plan, the teacher was interrupted and told in no uncertain terms by the principal "to follow the policy." All discussion abated thereafter. The new discipline policies were thus set in motion, carried out by a compliant, though in parts grumbling faculty, and enforced by a determined administration. In time, student discipline improved. The principal and her new administrative team succeeded in imposing a sense of orderly conduct upon the school that had previously been absent -- no small feat. This was accomplished through determined top-down action, the enforcement of strict rules guiding both students and teachers, the vigilance of the new administrative team, and a concentration of (wo)man power on the task of hall patrol, escorting, security, lunch time supervision, and other crowd control measures.

The no-hall-pass/escort policy resulted in a situation whereby School A's school students were rarely free to socialize and mingle unsupervised. In response, incidences of fighting, argument, and overall conflict among students decreased dramatically. According to one of the counselors at the school, incidences in his purview during the 1998/99 school year declined by 50 percnet compared to the previous year to. Order improved visibly in the hallways and the lunch room. For the outside observer, the contrast between the first and the second years of research was stark. While order in School A had disintegrated in the last weeks of school in the first year, in the second year order was maintained until the end of the school year. As a result of the new rules, students were in classrooms during instructional time and therefore at least present to engage in learning activities.

While it was mentioned repeatedly by both teachers and administrators that the situation outside of class had improved dramatically, it was also acknowledged that the climate inside classrooms was less positively affected. In dealing with internal classroom discipline, conflicts between administration and classroom teachers over the distribution of responsibility for disciplinary action surfaced that are perhaps endemic in schools with a high load of discipline infractions. In order to curb the overuse of referrals and student removal from classrooms, administrators insisted on teachers pursuing preliminary and intermediate steps prior to administrative action, such as required phone calls home. Some teachers, on the other hand, felt that the administration compromised teachers' position of authority when they refused to remove students from classrooms for what the teacher perceived to be serious infractions. For a few teachers, this conflict over discipline enforcement took quite dramatic forms to the point of feeling prepared to "walk off the job." Yet, even these teachers, despite having experienced dramatic incidences of conflict with administrators over this issue, gave credit to administrators for overall improved discipline. What was conspicuous in the case of School A was not that such conflicts occurred, but that such conflicts could develop to the boiling point despite a sense of respect that pervaded the teacher-administrator relationship. Amiss was a relationship of trust and mutual understanding between faculty and administration on matters of discipline. Disagreements of this nature notwithstanding, the administrative team found increasing support among the faculty for its discipline policies. Staff recognized that the school had improved and voiced these sentiments in conversations. In fact, when the administration put the no-hall-pass policy up for discussion at a faculty meeting in the second semester[1], the faculty overwhelmingly supported the retention of the policy.

Yet these drastic measures exacted a heavy price from the organization in terms of time and human resources. A description of lunch time may illustrate what it took for the school to maintain order and student discipline. Because of the modular schedule, lunch time at School A was an affair that lasted for the duration of two and a half hours during which the various teams brought their classes to the cafeteria. One member of the research team was visiting a teacher's classroom during the module prior to lunch. Towards the end of the lesson the teacher lined up her class in preparation for their walk to the cafeteria. Slowly the students filed out of the room forming a single line under the watchful eye of the teacher. The class began slowly walking towards the cafeteria hugging the wall and stopping at every corner and every clock, being constantly reminded by their teacher to behave and to stay in line. The class journeyed across one long hallway, a staircase, and another long hallway. As it got closer to the cafeteria, it encountered another group of students coming from the opposite direction and passing by in single file alongside the opposite wall, being constantly monitored by their teacher. Upon arrival at the cafeteria, the students seated themselves at their regular benches. They ate in the same seating arrangement every day. Walking around and contact with other groups of students was not permitted.

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[1] We rely on hearsay based on a number of conversations.

The cafeteria can also serve as an auditorium. During lunchtime, one of the vice principals occupied the stage with a microphone. As the students sat down at their tables, the escort duty of the teacher ceased and the students came under the watchful eyes of the vice principal and seven other adults present in the cafeteria, among them guidance counselors and security guards. "Young man, sit down, sit down!" one heard the vice principal exclaim through the microphone. This alerted one of the adults on the floor to approach the culprit. The student quickly sat down. One of the students in the group wanted to use the restroom. She was required to ask one of the security guards and was then escorted by one of them to the location and back to her seat.

After about twenty minutes to half an hour, lunch time was over for the observed group of students. Ms. L, the vice principal blew a whistle. "This is the signal for you to be quiet....You need to be quiet for dismissal," she exclaimed with emphasis into her microphone. The huge cafeteria immediately quieted down. As Ms. L dismissed students by rows, the teachers were on hand again to escort them back to their classes in the same familiar fashion. Students again lined up at the wall and, stopping at every corner and clock, slowly moved back to their team's instructional area. At School A, teachers took their substantial hall and escort duties seriously. Administrators were constantly patrolling the halls, walkie-talkies in hand. Security guards, guidance counselors as well as the administrators themselves were constantly on guard. During instructional periods it was up to this group (or anybody else who might be available) to be present when a classroom teacher requested an escort for a student. Thus, to maintain a safe and orderly environment, this school found it necessary not only to expend a great amount of adult time and energy on monitoring students, but also to severely restrict students' movement and unencumbered socializing. Supervision at School A was constructed as a seamless web. While the faculty seemed to have accepted the supervisory burden, if begrudgingly, a number of primarily younger faculty voiced concern in conversations that the school's restrictiveness was not age-appropriate, did not prepare students for high school, and did very little to make students internalize responsible conduct. But in the words of a staunch supporter of strict enforcement of student discipline this argument was not valid: "In a school like this either the adults or the students run the school."

The problem with the tight escort policy was, however, that it required (wo)man power that the administration often did not have at its disposal. As a result, when teachers summoned an escort for emergency situations, escorts did not show up, leaving the teacher the option of either breaking the school rules, or risking a conflict with students or parents. The administration held the line on the no-pass policy and would write up teachers who were found to have broken it which generated much resentment among faculty.

Decision Making and Communication Among Adults

When asked about faculty-administration relationships during the first months of the 1998/99 school year, interviewed teachers frequently referred to the initial faculty meeting when one of their colleagues was upbraided by the principal for voicing disagreement. The principal with the full force of her new team had made a clear statement about who was going to be in charge. It was up to the faculty, seasoned and novice alike, to comply:

> There's a difference between a leader and a boss and right now she's being a boss. And a boss is someone that yes, you have people working for you but not really. They don't really, they don't really want to overdo. A leader knows when to lead and knows when to follow. A leader can play both roles and sometimes a leader should be able to step back and say, "You know what. I don't really know. Maybe you might be a better person. Why don't you tell me how to do this." Or "Hey, why don't we all work together." And I don't see that happening at all in this school and I think that sadly kids are missing out because of it. (A-10)

Teachers exhibited a variety of reactions. Some teachers actively supported the new leadership and continued to be active in matters of school improvement, others were willing to give the new principal and her policies a chance to be successful. Many young and untenured teachers, eager for any support they could garner, were preoccupied with the daily challenges of classroom management and instruction and with demands from their own class-taking schedule so that whole-school issues were of lesser relevance to them. Perhaps about half of the faculty fell into this category during the 1998/99 school year. But towards the end of the term, some of the novice teachers felt that there was little room for their ideas at the school. In an informal conversation, one teacher observed that quite a number of young teachers at the school were in graduate school, being exposed to the newest ideas in the field, but that this potential was not utilized at the school. "I want to see a little piece of me in this school. (.......) The principal says this is the goal, and there is only *one* way to get there."

Finally there were reactions of skepticism, particularly among some senior faculty who had been instrumental at the school during previous years. Voicing misgivings about the new leadership taking over in such a commanding and assertive way, these teachers felt that the administration needed to be more cooperative and more respectful to teachers. In a few interviews with particularly vocal teachers, complaints were aired that the principal was insensitive to her staff and not interested in their voices while at the same time giving her credit for the situation in the hallways. A few teachers, one of them highly involved in the school improvement process, confided that they wished to exit immediately if only they could. The principal's "tight ship" alienated a group of vocal and highly involved classroom teachers.

> I think if the new administration had come in and, of course, they promised that if it wasn't broke, they wouldn't try to fix it, but it's been just the opposite. You know. And it kind of looks like and I think I said that, it almost makes it look like all the problems in the school the teacher caused. And people are very resentful of that... Now, I on the other hand, as I said, I like the quiet halls, I can teach without stepping out in the hall. There are no children moving in the halls. (A-16)

> We have a lot of new teachers. I think we have a good group of teachers, but I think the relationship between the teachers and administration is very strained. Thus, the teachers hands are tied behind their backs, almost that we feel as if *we* are on a lock-down type basis. I mean you can *see* with the hallway movement, having to escort the students here and there, we are losing out on good, you know, quality instruction time that we could have with the students, and ... that type of thing... just it's disheartening, knowing that what we say is really not taken into account. And that

> has been disheartening for *myself,* but I take an attitude that you know, I'm here for the kids and that's what I'm going to do. If I'm to do something, then I'll *do* it, but there have been a lot of requirements placed upon us that are unfair. (A-8)

Decision making during the 1998/99 school year was decidedly top-down. The faculty meetings observed by the research team were mainly informational, rather than occasions for lively deliberations of school policies or problems. In the 1999/2000 school year, the principal ceased to convene faculty meetings altogether. The school-based management team did not seem to be a key decision-making body; in fact the principal did not participate in it regularly. One observed SBMT meeting was primarily used for reports from the various segments of the school and for organizational matters. The school improvement team was primarily charged with the writing of the new version of the school improvement plan. As part of the school's improvement strategy, the administration compelled teachers to join a committee that was to be responsible for various aspects of the school organization, such as climate, hospitality, testing, awards, emergencies, etc. Some faculty members considered these committee assignments an undue infringement on their time. Nobody at the school had assumed the role of union representative, nor was there an avenue for these sentiments to surface. However, the discontent surfaced with an anonymous note put in every teacher's mail box. The note suggested that the principal had presumably violated the contract with these mandatory committee assignments. The principal responded by making the placing of material in teachers' mail boxes contingent upon principal permission.

The committee assignments were carried out and the committees convened, but they did not seem to exert much influence on the life of the school. During the first session of one of the committees the group discussed its task. Teachers came to the consensus that regular meetings were not required. Rather, the committee, it was decided, was to be reconvened only on specific occasions that demanded action. A report was sent to the administration. Clearly, this committee did not function in the spirit of lively collegiality or collegial responsibility for school improvement, rather the faculty answered to an administrative mandate. In Year III of probation these committees fell dormant. At least they were not mentioned as significant by any of the queried teachers.

This not to say that teachers at School A did not get involved in improving their school. A number of teachers became very involved as department heads or in other specific roles at the school. Many teachers attended the frequent professional development sessions that were offered as a result of the school's probationary status, and many were involved in the school's efforts to get prepared for the various school performance practice tests, spending long hours after school and during evenings. A substantial share of school improvement activities was carried out by teachers on release time, such as the mentor teacher, the specialist for school improvement, and the character education teacher. The administration was focused on discipline and overall management concerns during the 1998/99 school year. The managerial competence of the principal in running a school and the determined effort of her team were the primary engines that drew faculty members in and made them participants even though shared decision making and open deliberation was feebly developed at the school. At the end of Year II, teachers despite strong misgivings at times were willing to give the new administration time to succeed. Skepticism seemed to wane towards the end of the school year as the leadership succeeded in keeping the school on a solid footing. But some teachers continued to be dissatisfied and some decided to leave.

Instruction

One of the first instruction-related measures of the new administration was to mandate that all teachers prepare a written lesson plan for each lesson, that test vocabulary was prominently posted in classrooms, and that the official district curriculum guide was opened at the appropriate page during each lesson indicating that teachers presumably consulted the curriculum and that the lesson taught complied with it. The measures responded to district and state demands. Invoking the force of external authority, the principal admonished teachers to heed these clear and enforceable behaviors which would be "monitored by the state" and would also play a role in teachers' evaluations. During formal and casual classroom visits, the research team generally found that teachers had a copy of the district's *Scope and Sequence* within reach and that test vocabulary was generally posted, though it was not clear how this affected actual instruction. In particular, some senior teachers we talked to felt that daily written lesson plans were an unnecessary burden. They contended that an experienced teacher usually had a good image of the lesson in her head and therefore did not need to script the whole lesson. Perhaps one effect of the lesson plan requirement was that in the sample of classrooms we visited, teachers had posted lesson objectives on the board. The writing of daily lesson plans was enforced by spot checks and in the case of non-compliance by written admonitions.

As had been envisioned in the school improvement plan, an ambitious calendar of professional development was carried out. Of the 30 or so distinct in-service activities, about half were dedicated to test-related skills and preparation, such as familiarizing staff with the format of performance-based test items, learning how to score with rubrics, and actual scoring of practice tests (so called benchmarks). This proportion reflected the school's emphasis on test-related activities in the 1998/99 school year. Another set of workshops addressed classroom management or the middle school child and specifically appealed to the needs of the many young and novice teachers at School A. Two workshops on special education concerns drew participants from the special education department. Overall, attendance at these after-school and Saturday workshops was deemed satisfactory, with about half the faculty attending many of the sessions. However, strong encouragement from the administration and personal entreaties from the coordinator of the sessions were deemed necessary for keeping attendance up. In conversations, participants found the sessions helpful even though a direct effect on actual classroom performance was less obvious to them.

A major component of the school's instruction-related activities was the organization of test simulation activities. The accountability system measures the performance of the school with two testing programs: the basic skills based Maryland Functional Tests given during the first semester and the performance-based MSPAP during the second semester. School A strongly emphasized both tests. As a reconstitution-eligible school, School A was required by the district to carry out twice as many practice test activities as a regular school. MSPAP practice required enormous organizational resources as the administration decided to frequently practice the randomized group format that the test employs.

In the 1998/99 school year, the school managed to hold three so called benchmark and two so called milestone activities. The tasks or prompts for these practice tests were mostly provided by subject-matter district offices. The prompts were then scored by those faculty members who had participated in the holistic scoring training. The scoring turned out to be very time intensive and was paid for with additional funds. When funds ran out, scoring ceased with the result that the last-quarter benchmark test remained unscored. Thus, during the last quarter students had the opportunity to practice for the MSPAP test, and teachers had another opportunity to organize a dry run of the actual test, but the school was unable to use the information from the benchmark to gauge its performance. In addition to these practice test activities, teachers were strongly encouraged to use preparation material for the Maryland Functional Tests given in reading, writing, and mathematics.

These extensive test preparation activities were considered a necessary prerequisite for the smooth launching of the tests for both teachers and students, but they also put a tremendous burden on faculty and administration. Firstly, because of the use of the randomized group format, the regular instructional program was interrupted during times when major test preparation activities were scheduled as well as during the actual testing periods. Secondly, the scoring of practice tests took place outside regular instructional routines. It required a great deal of time from the scoring team and from teachers on release time who were instrumental in both the organization and evaluation of the practice tests. Thirdly, the funneling-back of practice test results into regular classrooms was cumbersome since test groups and regular classrooms were not identical and only a small group of teachers was involved in the scoring. Therefore, many classroom teachers were not familiar with the meaning of the scores and their use for further instructional purposes. Moreover, in some instances scoring results reached classroom teachers too late to be used as an evaluative or instructional tool for the quarter in which the practice test was conducted. Untimely and unclear reporting (e.g., hard-to-interpret district-generated quantitative tabulations) greatly diminished the diagnostic value of these practice tests for instruction and school improvement. Considering this situation, the administration opted to cancel one of the scheduled practice test activities. The test-related work School A engaged in was nevertheless substantial. It is unlikely that these test preparation schemes could have been carried out without extra funds, the willingness of staff to work overtime, and the availability of a number of hard-working teachers on release time who dedicated themselves to the task.

In the eyes of many faculty members in the school, the frequent practicing of the test paid off. Faculty members reported that when it came time for the test, students seemed familiar with the test format and were more positively disposed towards the test than in previous years even though, according to some teachers, many of their students were hard pressed to complete test assignments. Test organization was smooth and orderly, and teachers knew what to expect. As a result, faculty members were expecting an increase in the school's performance scores; and indeed the school improved its scores modestly during that year.

These successes in increased test-taking efficiency notwithstanding, conversations with teachers and classroom visits revealed that MSPAP practice test activities were not well embedded in daily classroom routines, nor was their diagnostic use for the instructional improvement process clear. The benchmarks, for example, were not a useful a tool to plot the school's progress on specific performance-based skills; they were often not integrated into the regular quarterly grading scheme, nor were they necessarily cumulative assessments of learned curriculum in the regular classroom. Our sample of observed lessons is too small to make any statements about prevalent patterns of instruction at the school, but observed lessons accompanied by subsequent interviews revealed a shallow penetration of performance-based pedagogy into regular classrooms.

Instructional specialists strongly suggested activities for teachers, but did not take an active stance on implementation, nor did the house teams generally seem to exert collegial encouragement or control in the area of classroom instruction. Teachers reported in interviews instances of common planning of curriculum and an exchange of materials and ideas, but a systematic approach to curriculum reform was not visible. Absent a lively collegial exchange on curriculum and a voluntary opening of classroom doors to colleagues and specialists, the means left for instructional reform were active encouragement and prodding on the part of the instructional specialists and mandated activities (such as lesson plans or practice tests) easily monitored by the administration.

Classroom teachers describe their strategies in this way:

> I just went back, made sure that I'm using the proficiency levels in my teaching, made sure that I'm doing writing prompts, make sure that I'm hitting the vocabulary that my students are going to need to understand for the tests, just trying to, doing performance-based activities where it involves a hands-on or writing, a write up, reflection, a justification... just trying to do things that will hit the proficiency levels and the different skills that my children would need. Kind of make them understand

the importance of the test, saying to them in class, "You gonna need this for MSPAP. This is a MSPAP skill." So that they start to see that hey, it must mean something to, you know, to us, because he's saying that it's for that. I think *that's* the way maybe we can get them to buy into it, if we just continuously talk about it and talk about it. (A-2)

We've had, we've tried to do what I was just discussing about reviewing formulas ... and this is just not specific information that we know, 'cause we don't know what's on the test. But it's like, from what is globally sort of known as the MSPAP vocabulary. We do a vocabulary word a day. We try to use all of the objectives, and our scope and sequence, you know, especially, of course we do it all year long, but we try in I think the second semester to constantly keep our eye on things that we know they do need to review and think about and not forget. (A-3)

Well, again, I go back to a thing as simple as a calendar, as just the coordination of knowledge, and dissemination of knowledge to people that need to know the preplanning, the tightening up of efforts, the looking ahead, which I think is what, I can't say is vision, but is part of someone's vision to be able to be planning for June, when September is just starting. To know where you're headed. And so, from my point of view, coming from a private situation, where everything was *very* planned, my first years were a bit frustrating, because it seemed, not as, well, it's just that everyone needs to know, ahead of time, what is going to happen, and what is expected of them. (A-4)

Well, the only thing that I could say that's happening differently, is we're doing a lot of the same things except this year it's being mandated. A lot of the things that were done on a volunteer basis are now being mandated. (A-6)

The initial strategy is basically to try to get as many staff developments going as we can and to get teachers to buy into it so they take ownership of our school improvement plan. I mean they have a school improvement plan that I think we can use to make a difference with. (A-15)

Yes. We're putting the MSPAP words into focus on a daily basis, in the objective, in activities, in homework. More hands-on, more problem-solving techniques. Getting the kids to a point where they are trying to and *force* them to pay attention and follow directions more.....using the graphic organizer. We're trying on a daily basis higher-order thinking, definitely. So, we're pulling out tidbits, and trying to focus on MSPAP on a daily basis. (A-16)

Interviews with teachers uncovered a number of obstacles mitigating the effect of the performance-based test on routine instruction. Teachers were generally not sure that the test measured fairly what they accomplished in the classroom. Seeing a great need for basic skills training and gauging their students' achievement level far below the test's proficiency level, some teachers perceived the test as inappropriate for their students and at times distracting from their main educative mission. Particularly, but not only, novice teachers pointed to the overwhelming challenge of maintaining control in their classes and of inculcating basic work habits (e.g., bringing material, regular attendance) into their students as obstacles to more ambitious pedagogy. An example of these challenges is the dramatic case of a novice teacher who abandoned the student-centered format of her lessons altogether and adopted a worksheet-based silent seat work format for the sake of classroom control. Teachers who found a way to get through to their challenging student population questioned the pedagogical expertise of "the state" and external visitors who for their part could probably "not handle these kids." Lastly, some teachers lacked awareness of where their teaching fell short in light of the state's demand for a more ambitious pedagogy. But because public dialog about these kinds of issues were absent in School A, the school found it hard to develop a commonly agreed-upon strategy of instructional reform by meshing external accountability demands with teachers' internal wisdom. The research team concluded at the end of Year II of probation:

> To deepen instructional reform in the coming year, two paths could be taken. One path would be an extension of this year's preferred style: evaluations could become more forceful, teachers with special assignments could be empowered to play a larger supervisory role, and more activities could be mandated (beyond daily lessons plans), such as the planning of specific instructional activities in teams and departments. While this may challenge teachers to adopt new measures, it is not clear how this

> strategy can ameliorate teachers' commitment to remain at School A. The other conceivable path would bank on deeper voluntary involvement of faculty: it would begin with a conversation about School A's specific needs, challenges, and resistence with regard to the state's high performance goals; it would aim at collegial consensus on what external expectations could realistically and appropriately be met or unmet and which ones could become planks in the school's improvement project; it would strengthen an open and collaborative climate of dialog between leadership and faculty that would instill enough trust in teachers to open their classroom doors and let in new challenges and perhaps at times uncomfortable realizations. Such a strategy may help stench the constant turnover of faculty and overcome the over-reliance on external features of instructional reform, such as workshops, test-taking schemes, easily monitored behaviors, etc. that in most cases result in "tidbits" in the classroom, rather than the sustained revamping of curriculum and instruction that would be needed. (Memo)

Year III: The School Fragments

Data collection in the third year of probation consisted of short follow-up visits and fairly unstructured conversations, following a broadly structured protocol, with about ten members of the faculty who had continued at the school from the previous school year. Year III began, as had Year II, with a fairly new faculty. Many of the newcomers were inexperienced and had to learn the basics of teaching. But the leadership provided consistency this year. The path taken was the continuation of the Year II pattern of leadership style and strategies. But in Year III this pattern brought upon the school a sense of severity and conflict, not encountered in the previous school year. The school continued to rely on test-taking schemes (e.g., quarterly benchmarks, test preparation packages), the no pass/escort policy, the monitoring and enforcing of classroom behaviors (e.g., daily lesson plans, district curricula), and other work habits (e.g., teacher tardies, hall duty). The character education component was terminated. For the 1999/2000 school year, the school was forced to adopt an external comprehensive school project that was supposed to deepen instructional changes. Choosing such a project was not necessarily desired by the school. Classroom teachers lamented that the project would be "one more thing to do" on the list of additional duties, and members of the leadership team fretted that staff development monies would dry up for other purposes. The project consultants trained some teachers, and it generated a few quite ambitious student-centered projects, but in its first year at the school it fell far short in its claim to comprehensively change the school or the classroom, according to both detractors and supporters of the project. But in Year III, instructional reform was overshadowed by interpersonal strife between administration and faculty.

From the point of view of some teachers, the year began with a clear symbol of the administration's disregard for teachers. The faculty lounge had been converted to an administrative office so that the whole administrative team could be close to the principal, while the teachers' lounge was relocated to a small, fairly dark space that could accommodate a soda machine and mail boxes, but very little else. Some more outspoken members of the faculty decided to form a faculty advisory council. Rather than opening lines of communication, confrontation ensued. Faculty meetings were no longer held. Teachers complained about the "heavy hand" of the administration. The airing of complaints and the lack of communication resulted in a meeting of the faculty with the regional director/area superintendent without the principal present.[2] Among other items, faculty spokespersons demanded that the principal cease to rebuke teachers in public, in front of students and over the public announcement system. They also voiced concern over the large number of "pink slips" (i.e. written admonitions that remain in the teacher's personnel file for the duration of their tenure in the district) that some members of the faculty had received for minor infractions. The outcome of this conflict was uncertain at the time data collection concluded. But it resulted in the determination on the part of some senior faculty to finally turn their backs on the school. At the end of Year III, the leadership team itself was in the process of dissolving. In the open strife between faculty and administration, some of the members of the leadership team were accused of being disloyal and were counseled by the principal to seek a transfer.

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[2] The research team was not present at this meeting. We rely on a number of accounts from both council members and members of the leadership team.

Summary

School A responded to its probationary status in two distinct ways. Initially, reconstitution-eligibility resulted in a fragmentation of the organization. The principal at the time approached her task with a "go-it-alone" attitude reinforced by the fact that in this phase requisite knowledge of reconstitution rested in her and a very small cadre of teachers. The district itself had to learn about the state program during this phase. The faculty left it up to their principal to take charge. When she failed, the school disintegrated, leading eventually to the demise of the leadership and a substantial part of the faculty.

In the second year, a principal with a decidedly top-down, interventionist, and managerial leadership style took charge. This time, however, the principal had more experience with the kind of challenges that awaited her. Not only did she have a known track record of success at a similar school, she was also able to begin her new assignment with her own administrative team which she was permitted to assemble. As a result, she could rely on at least four strong personalities from the outset. In time, she attracted increasing involvement from her staff for her improvement strategies. As the base of involved faculty expanded over time, she retained firm control of the staff and organization. Throughout the school year, to varying degrees, she was faced with the muted alienation of those faculty who missed their voice in the affairs of school and who bemoaned the lack of open deliberation, though her accomplishments on hall discipline were generally recognized and respected.

The new administrative team zeroed in on student discipline although this had not been a major focus of the state-approved school improvement plan for the school. With determined top-down action, tight and forcefully enforced rules, and an organization to back up the ambitious goals, the administrative team successfully established a sense of order in the school that was most visible in the hallways and the cafeteria and was strong enough to withstand the centrifugal forces that ordinarily set in at the end of the school year. This gave the school the necessary space to turn attention to instructional matters. In this area, the school focused on professional development and extensive test practice that aimed at increasing efficiency of test taking procedures. The latter familiarized both staff and students with the format of the state performance test and helped work out the logistics of test organization. As a result, testing ran smoothly during the 1998/99 school year even though the testing coordinator left the school mid-year. Both the enforcement of school-wide discipline and the frequent practice tests required enormous time, energy, and determination. At the end of the principal's first term, the faculty was torn between a sense of accomplishment and a sense of alienation due to the heavy hand of the principal and, in the case of some activists, due to a sense of exhaustion. Though much more orderly on the student side, the school year ended with the renewed fragmentation of the faculty as about two thirds of the faculty opted to leave the school. Some left for personal reasons, others moved up on the career ladder, but a number of leavers felt that the leadership style of the principal left them no other alternative.

From the observer's point of view, what needed strengthening at the end of Year II was the shoring up of teacher commitment to the organization by making teachers feel appreciated and valued members of the organization and the embedding of practice tests into the routines of daily instruction and a careful revamping of regularly taught teaching units and lessons, something the school pledged in fairly general terms in its past school improvement plan. The accomplishments of the 1998/99 school year were brought about by the organization of instructional activities, many of them outside the core of instructional routines, enforcement of rules, and monitoring of surface behavior. As far as these specific school improvement strategies were concerned, administrators focused their energy on management, organization and order, (in addition to many other regular duties that are not touched upon here). For instructional leadership the administration relied on teachers with special assignments, primarily department heads, the reading specialist, the mentor/master teacher, and the resource teacher for school improvement as well as the initiatives and materials provided by the district. But teachers, especially those with tenure, retained their traditional instructional autonomy in their classrooms.

Year III saw a worsening of the conflict between an increasingly rigid administration and a disillusioned faculty rather than a deepening of instructional reform. For the administration, high-stakes accountability had translated into a strategy of increased control that came to be strongly resented by large numbers of faculty. As long as increased control was associated with a visible gain in organizational efficiency, faculty as a whole tolerated the negative tone that accompanied many of the principal's measures. But improvement gains that could be accomplished with such a strategy were very limited. Foremost, such strategy could not stop the enormous turnover of faculty. Serious teacher morale problems, the enormous costs entailed in keeping students under control, and the inability of the school to move beyond basic survival and secure improvement gains through a focus on instruction resulted in a pervasive sense of gloom that set in over the faculty. After three years of probation, School A was seriously fragmented, torn between an administration for whom accountability meant forceful control and increased rigidity and a faculty in part rebellious and in part abandoning "the sinking ship."

SCHOOL B

by Kim Curtis

Background/Organization

School B is located in a large Maryland suburban county adjacent to an urban core in a major East Coast metropolitan area. The county's population is predominantly African American and has expanded rapidly throughout the 1980s and 1990s as families from the nearby city have sought refuge from the urban woes of poverty, violence, and poor educational services. However, as the pattern of middle class migration has continued its outward trajectory, the older, more proximate portions of the county have begun to take on the appearance of a neglected urban center. While the school itself is located in a middle class neighborhood, the county's busing plan has created a situation whereby over 85 percent of its students are brought from various locations within the county, including several low-income neighborhoods similarly located along the county's border with the urban core. Reflecting the racial composition of both the portion of the county in which the school is located as well as the majority of Maryland schools on probation, 90 percent of the 599 students attending School B during the 1999/2000 school year were African American.

Housed in a two-story red brick building, School B is situated just a few miles across the border from the city limits in an aging, yet still pleasant, middle class neighborhood comprised of a mixture of single-family homes and garden apartments. It is located within five minutes from a major regional shopping center with which it has been able to create several sustained-school community linkages. The school is positioned at the dead end of a winding neighborhood street lined with brick houses that appear to date from the late 1950s or early 1960s, a time when suburbanization was just taking off in the county. It is separated from the surrounding neighborhood by ample field space, enough for two playgrounds, a sports field, and basketball courts, which are shared by a neighboring elementary school situated just 500 yards to the right of School B. The surrounding parking areas and walkways are clean, well maintained and lined with trees and green shrubbery.

At the school's main entrance, visitors are greeted by two heavy gray doors leading to a hallway that is decorated with motivational banners, trophies, honor roll lists, and student artwork. During one school visit, homemade election posters were observed hanging in the hallway advertising candidates for the school's student government association. Further inside the building, School B's 30 self-contained classrooms are laid out in roughly an "H" formation, with two wings leading off of the main hallway where the office, guidance room, teachers' lounge, reading lab (stocked with approximately 15 new computers), and four seventh grade classrooms can all be found. The left wing contains the library, a computer lab, and the majority of the seventh and eight grade academic classrooms, while the right wing houses the sixth grade classrooms, cafeteria, shop class, and gymnasium. In addition two portable classrooms are located just outside the gym.

The school opened its doors in 1964 as a comprehensive junior high school serving grades 7, 8, and 9, but like all other junior high schools in the county, it was subsequently converted to a middle school for just grades 7 and 8. In 1984, the school became a math and science magnet as the county sought an alternative to forced busing as a means to comply with its desegregation order. According to one teacher of long standing, the magnet program introduced a number of "top notch" (B18) students to the school which, in turn, helped to alleviate a serious discipline problem at the school. Over the years, however, the magnet program has receded in its overall importance to the educational mission of the school; so much so that a recent Maryland

State On-Site Review could not even detect a differentiated curriculum for magnet students. Due to overcrowding in nearby elementary schools and boundary changes, a sixth grade was added to School B in 1992.

The school's administration is comprised of one principal, one assistant principal, and one administrative intern. While the principal provides general oversight to all administrative and instructional issues, the vice principal is primarily responsible for discipline matters. Referred to as "Mr. Discipline" (B20) by one staff member, his addition to the administration three years ago has been credited by teachers with greatly improving the school's overall climate, which to someone visiting the school in 1999/2000 would appear to be generally inviting and conducive to learning. With teachers responsible for transporting students to and from their classes and lunch period in single file lines, School B does not appear to have problems with students loitering in the halls during class time or with crowds of students milling about the school office. In addition, although teachers and administrators are not afraid to raise their voices when they encounter misconduct, interactions with students seem generally pleasant and good-natured. For example, in the morning as students make their way to their first class, they frequently stop and chat with teachers who are positioned outside their classroom doors to monitor the goings on in the hallway. During this time, quick hugs and playful banter are not uncommon.

In terms of organizational structure, the standard middle school model is used for grades seven and eight, with students organized into houses or families. The sixth grade operates under a modified middle school model with some subjects taught using a middle school methodology and others using an elementary-based methodology. The average class size at School B is 25 for grades seven and eight. However, because the sixth grade operates under a Milliken racially non-diverse model, the student to staff ratio for that grade is just 20 to 1.

School B is arranged into six teams: one sixth grade team, two seventh grade teams (magnet and comprehensive), two eighth grade teams (magnet and comprehensive), and one creative arts team. Each of the five academic teams attends to between 100 and 125 students and is comprised of one language arts teacher, one science teacher, one math teacher and one social studies teacher. In addition, the four seventh and eighth grade teams also have a foreign language, reading and/or health teacher. The creative arts team consists of physical education, family and consumer sciences, technology education, band, and art. The creative arts block rotates subjects on a quarterly basis. To facilitate contact among teachers and students within any given team, team members are located in proximity to each other. Common planning periods also serve as mechanisms for promoting teacher contact and collaboration.

About half of the students are enrolled in the school's comprehensive or general education program, while the other half are enrolled in the school's magnet program that prepares them to compete for slots at a magnet program located in a nearby high school. According to the School Improvement Plan, the magnet program is "designed to provide an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based approach to learning and applying science, math, [and] technology." However, as noted earlier, signs of this program are not readily apparent to outsiders. Rather, the program seems to be used primarily as a way to group better behaved and more academically oriented students together.

Of note is the fact that the magnet and comprehensive programs are divided physically within the building. This physical division appears to reinforce a psychological divide felt by teachers and students alike. Teachers belonging to both magnet and comprehensive teams made note of student self-esteem issues that they believe are the result of the unconcealed tracking that takes place at School B. According to one seventh grade comprehensive teacher:

> ...the kids on this team are constantly talking about 'I'm not magnet, I'm comprehensive.' They are very aware. They believe that the magnet team is a better program and that it is stronger and that those are the smarter kids. (B1)

Interestingly, a magnet English teacher noted that she had just the opposite problem with her students. She believes that the strict magnet/comprehensive divide has contributed to an over-inflated sense of ability among her students. While her kids "think that they are smart," (B15) they are, in actuality, reading below grade level. She fears that her students' placement in the magnet program has given their parents a false sense of security with regard to their true academic abilities.

Despite the fact that testing has revealed the achievement of magnet students to be relatively on par with their comprehensive counterparts, teachers prefer to teach magnet students because, as one teacher noted, they "seem to take education a little more seriously" and "there's not as much misbehavior" (B4). This preference has created a situation in which the school's most seasoned instructors teach the "easiest" kids. Meanwhile, on the other side of the building, the more challenging comprehensive students are left in the hands of the comparatively inexperienced junior staff.

With the exception of the lack of Title I students, School B's educational load indicators generally reflect the county's norm. However, as compared to other reconstitution eligible schools, School B's educational load is considerably lighter. In particular, the school's relatively small number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch contrasts sharply with the average free and reduced lunch rate for schools on probation (generally somewhere around 70 percent of the student body). The table below presents information concerning School B's educational load for the period from 1996 to 2000. This period corresponds to the year preceding School B's identification as a reconstitution-eligible school all the way through to the last year for which such indicators are available. Of note is the relatively steady decline in the number of School B students qualifying for free and reduced lunches. In 1997, the year the school experienced its precipitous MSPAP decline, just under half of all students received free or reduced lunches. However, by 1999, this number had been reduced to approximately one third of the student body. Although the explanation for this decline is unknown, it is noteworthy that recent increases on School B's MSPAP test scores appear to coincide with the improved economic standing of its student population.

Table 1

Year	Free/Reduced Lunch	Entrants/ Withdrawals	Special Education	Attendance Rate	Title I	Limited English Proficient
1996	48.9%	21.4%/19.9%	5.2%	93.1%	0%	0%
1997[1]	47.2	18.0/13.6	5.0	92.8	0	0
1998	40.0	19.7/18.8	5.1	92.1	0	0
1999	35.7	18.8/16.7	9.1	91.5	0	0
2000	42.4	15.6/17.1	5.8	92.6	0	0

Despite this comparatively light educational load, the teachers at School B characterize their students as possessing many of those problems traditionally associated with the inner city, including poverty, homelessness, single-parent families, and lack of parental engagement in the educational process. Lack of parental engagement was found to be particularly troubling to many of the teachers who, for the most part, rated parental involvement as light to nonexistent. Indicative of most teachers' sentiments is the following quote:

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[1] Data from this testing year used to declare School B reconstitution-eligible.

> These children are coming from your lower economics, so the parents don't have time to get involved that much because they're busy working. They probably have two, three, or four kids and it's a real challenge for them to be involved with the school. But most of the time when I call the parents, the parents are very supportive. (B4)

While readily acknowledging that the majority of parents are responsive to phone calls and concerned about their children's wellbeing, there is a general belief among most teachers that the parents are not fulfilling their role as true partners in the educational process. In fact, of the six teachers specifically asked about their particular vision for School B's improvement, all but one mentioned the crucial role parental involvement plays in school's ability to enhance its academic performance.

Performance History

Despite its reconstitution-eligible status, School B's 1999 Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) scores exceeded the county average for the second year in a row. In fact, the promising MSPAP gains made by the school in the wake of its reconstitution-eligible status were the reason the school was selected for study by the research team.[2] Although declines in MSPAP performance were experienced during the 2000 test administration, its composite score of 29 was just slightly less than district average of 31 and places School B thirteenth among the county's 25 middle schools. However, notwithstanding its relative success within the county, School B still lags well below the desired MSPAP composite score of 70 percent established by the state as an indicator of satisfactory school performance.

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[2] Because the School B was selected on the basis of gains made after being declared reconstitution-eligible, entry was not made until 1999.

The school was identified as reconstitution-eligible in January of 1998 when its 1996/97 MSPAP composite index plummeted by more than nine points. Prior to this drop, the school had been making relatively steady progress on both its MSPAP and Maryland State Functional test results. According to those at School B, the severity of the decline, as opposed to a persistent pattern of low performance, was the reason the school was added to the state' probationary list. Interestingly, although 1997 marked a severe decline in School B's MSPAP performance, its Maryland Functional results for that school year did not reflect a similar tumble. In fact, while the reading scores dipped slightly, small gains were actually realized on both writing and math scores.

As dramatic as the 1997 test score decline was for School B, its rebound the following year proved to be even more dramatic. In a surprising jump, School B improved its MSPAP composite index rating by more than 17 percentage points, from a low of 18.0 percent in 1997 to 35.5 percent in 1998. With a 1999 composite index rating of 36.4 (6.2 percentage points above the county's average), the school demonstrated its ability to solidify those gains made during the 1997/98 school year. However, no additional improvement was forthcoming. In fact, School B experienced a test score decline during the 1999/2000 school year when its MSPAP composite index fell seven percentage points.

Interestingly, in the two years since being declared reconstitution-eligible, School B has made notable strides on the Maryland Functional writing test. Although some ground was lost during the 2000 school year, test score gains for the 1998 and 1999 exams exceeded five percentage points each. This substantial improvement may reflect the school's strong post-probation emphasis on reading, writing, and language usage across subject areas. It may also reflect the school's ability to improve the basic skills of low achieving students, the focus of the

Maryland Functional testing program. Table 2 charts School B's performance history on the MSPAP and the Maryland Functional reading, writing, and math tests for the years 1993 to 2000.

Table 2: Performance History

Year	State Satisfactory Rating	1993 %	1994 %	1995 %	1996 %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %
MSPAP Composite	70	20.2	19.6	28.7	27.2	18.0	35.5	36.4	29.0
Maryland Functional Reading	95	96.8	95.7	96.2	99.2	98.7	99.1	98.0	97.1
Maryland Functional Writing	90	95.3	91.3	83.2	78.6	82.9	88.7	94.3	90.6
Maryland Functional Math	80	66.2	60.9	62.8	75.7	76.0	73.0	72.3	66.8

School B's faculty and staff members do not have concrete explanations as to why the school's MSPAP scores have fluctuated in recent years. However, most teachers tended to rely on traditional notions concerning students' disparate intelligence and ability levels to explain the test score changes. For them, the poor 1997 turnout came at the hands of nothing more than a "bad crop" of children that year. Regarding this point, a sixth grade teacher noted: "The teachers have all been here for years so it can't be teacher change. A lot of it depends on the kids and their motivation, too" (B14). Another teacher blamed the score drop on a potential cohort effect. As he commented: "A different group of kids, different mentalities. These kids move together. They have a mentality based on their group..." (B2).

However, the administration points to a slightly different explanation. They cite a particularly high teacher turnover rate that year which resulted in an influx of new and inexperienced teachers. Regarding this point, the 1998/99 School Improvement Plan comments:

"the school has no data that provides a direct link between non-tenured teachers and lower test scores; however, in 1996/1997 [School B] had more non-tenured teachers than ever before and the greatest decline in test scores."

This high number of non-tenured teachers is also believed to have contributed to a discipline problem that school year which has since been addressed. In fact, just 54 students were suspended through March of 2000 at School B. This number reflects an average of 9 suspensions a month and marks a steady decline from suspension rates of prior years, which peaked during the 1996/97 school year. The 1997/98 school year marked the arrival of a new vice principal with a strong disciplinarian bent who most teachers believe has made School B a safer and more pleasant place to be. Although several teachers cited lack of student discipline as a challenge to their classroom instruction, many credit an overall improvement in discipline throughout the building for enhancing the seriousness with which students take their studies. Concerning this fact, one teacher noted:

> …my teaching is a lot better today simply because there is more control in the building. This building was out of control that year that [the test scores] dropped. I mean those kids were just bouncing off the walls and now with the new administration, [the vice principal] is extremely hard on the kids. There is a lot more… they are behaving much better. They are on task. (B19)

Year	Attendance Rate	Percent of Students Suspended
1996	93.1	6.6%
1997	92.8	15.1
1998	92.1	11.3
1999	91.5	11.1
2000	92.6	8.6*

*Through March 2000

Attendance at School B for the 1999/2000 school year was 92.6 percent. This figure is below the state's satisfactory standard of 94 percent and, although improved from the previous school year, reflects a gradual decline from a high of 93.9 percent in 1994. In some interviews, teachers indicated that high rates of absenteeism among students hinders their ability to move through the curriculum at the appointed pace. For example, one teacher noted: "students being absent, that's a problem in my class because then I'm stuck with the challenge of catching that student up. When am I going to do that? And it's really hard to go back and find time, unless you stay after, come early, come during lunch, come during planning and that's all back on me again" (B17). Although the student to teacher ratio is listed at 25 to 1, during the six classroom observations conducted at School B, attendance averaged just 18 students.

School B attributes "a small core of students who resist compulsory attendance" as well as a "lag time between the time a student is removed from the school and the time the school is officially notified of their withdrawal" to their lower than desired attendance rates. As means to bolster these figures, a highly visible chart detailing the school's monthly attendance rate has been posted in the front hallway. In addition, the school utilizes a computerized calling system to notify parents of daily absences and the guidance office contacts the parents of chronically absent students to discuss possible interventions.

Stability

During the 1999/2000 school year, School B possessed a faculty of 50, 42 of which were assigned to classroom positions. Among this staff, 40 held either advanced or standard professional certifications while 10 held provisional certifications. Notably, the school was able to reduce the number of provisionally certified teachers by 16 from the previous school year when School B's number of provisionally certified teachers peaked at 26. Reflecting the school's racial composition, approximately two-thirds of the teaching staff is African American. In addition, the faculty is overwhelmingly female.

Unlike most schools that find themselves placed on the state's reconstitution-eligible list, School B has been able to maintain a relatively high level of stability over time. Exemplifying this stability is the fact that the principal has been at the school for 18 years, an increasingly rare situation in a school district that has experienced a principal turnover rate of over 40 percent within the last three years alone. Up until recently the teaching staff was also described as relatively stable. However, as noted earlier, 1997 marked a turning point for School B, when it lost half of its eighth grade teaching staff. In the ensuing years, turnover has remained relatively heavy, although not nearly as heavy as that experienced by other reconstitution-eligible schools where more than half of all faculty members have been known to depart a school in just a single year.

Approximately 50 percent of the core teaching staff working at School B during the 1999/2000 school year arrived in the years since it was placed on probation in 1998. In particular, the math and science departments have been especially hard hit, with eight of the 10 teachers in each of these departments either in their first or second year of teaching at School B. During interviews, members of both the administration and teaching staff commented on an unusually large turnover after the 1998/99 school year, School B's first full year as a recon-eligible school. In total 11 teachers left for positions at other schools.

While opinions about the ability and motivation of these departed teachers varied considerably, little disagreement exists as to why teachers think they left. Administrators and teachers, alike, believe that these teachers left because they did not want to continue with the burden of MSPAP preparation and testing in a reconstitution-eligible school. Cited as evidence is the fact that some of the departed teachers left for positions at area high schools where high-stakes testing is not currently used as a mechanism for evaluating student and school performance. Concerning this fact, one teacher had the following to say:

> Many teachers, especially teachers who've been on the battlefield for a while, are not real comfortable with the extra stress. You know teaching has a lot of demands. And anybody who's an effective teacher generally, on a good day, goes home tired. And so with the added stress of "Oh, the State is here." I mean, you know, there's some added stress to being recon-eligible. And I think teachers are reluctant to continue with that added stress. (B7)

School statistics appear to support this teacher's sense that the school has recently lost some of its more experienced educators. In fact, of the 11 teachers who left after the 1998/99 school year, seven had been in the profession for at least six years. Indeed, six of these veteran teachers were considered to be in the prime of their career, possessing between six and 15 years' experience. In what represented a loss of experience and expertise, most of School B's departing mid-career teachers were replaced by newcomers to the field. Eight additional teachers with zero to five years' experience were added to the staff during the 1999/2000 school year. With these new hires, a full two thirds of School B's staff had no more than five years of teaching experience. While several of the teachers of longer standing noted their appreciation of the enthusiasm and fresh outlook (B4, B8, B11) the new teachers brought to the building, there are signs that they have struggled with their new assignments. One first-year social studies teacher resigned mid-year and another first-year English teacher noted that she was "just trying to keep [her] head over water." (B15).

Among the veteran teachers that chose to stay on at School B, commitment was found to be generally lacking. While the majority of teachers interviewed said they enjoyed working with the faculty and staff at School B and noted that they would not leave for a school with similar characteristics, at least half remarked that they had either seriously considered or would consider taking opportunities elsewhere. When asked this same question in a confidential survey, the number of teachers who said that they had thought about leaving School B rose to 71 percent. Concerns about low pay, student composition, lack of respect, and high stress brought on by the pressure to raise MSPAP scores headed the list of reasons why teachers would consider transferring to another school or even leaving the profession altogether.

In summary, it appears that School B's placement on the reconstitution-eligible list has hastened a destabilization process that began during the 1996/97 school year. Since that time, the school has experienced a 50 percent turnover among core teaching personnel and an influx of young, inexperienced teachers. Among those veteran teachers who chose to remain at School B after it was placed on probation, commitment is not particularly strong. Faced with a combination of internal and external factors that they believe compel them to look for other options, their future at School B is in no way certain. Ironically, although one of School B's stated SIP goals is to "promote the recruitment, professional development, and retention of a quality workforce," its post-probationary policies have served to produce just the opposite effect. In fact, when surveyed, teachers rated stabilizing faculty turnover as the second largest challenge currently facing School B.

One seventh grade teacher notes the basic problem with a teaching force that is constantly in flux: "We have to start all over again and again" (B11). Research has found that consistency and experience are integral aspects of high performing schools. Thus, without a general stabilization of its instructional staff, it seems that the ultimate effectiveness of School B's improvement efforts may be threatened.

Yearly Snapshots: Images of a Reconstitution-Eligible School[3]

Year I: Reconstitution-Eligibility Comes to School B

School B was informed of its addition to the state's list of reconstitution-eligible schools in January of 1998. Teachers and administrative staff, alike, report being quite surprised by the state's actions. Although the school's MSPAP score decline had been severe, prior test scores had noted modest but steady gains. Several teachers expressed dismay that the school had been placed on probation on the basis of just one year's worth of bad scores, which they viewed as more of a fluke than as an indicator of a troubled school. In addition, they were perplexed as to how a school that had received a Maryland School Performance Recognition Certificate one year could be declared "reconstitution-eligible" the very next. Upon notification of the school's reconstitution-eligibility, the principal set out to immediately garner teacher and community acceptance of the school's new status by emphasizing the additional money and technical assistance that the school would receive. At the same, time he embarked upon an inclusive teacher-driven approach to writing the state-mandated school improvement plan (SIP) that was to serve as School B's blueprint for reform.

While information is not available to assess school sentiments at the end of the 1997/98 school year, that just five teachers departed School B might serve as an indication that teachers were relatively satisfied with the way the principal had handled the school's initial tenure as a school on probation. This low faculty turnover rate contrasts sharply with the experiences of other newly labeled recon-eligible schools where massive departures of 50 percent or more of the faculty were not uncommon.

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[3] The year-by-year snapshots provided in this section are included to orient the reader to the key activities and actions that occurred in each of the three school years spanning this case study. It is important to note that the research team gained access to School B during the beginning of Year III (September 1999). Thus, information used to construct the case histories for Years I and II is based on interviewee recollections and reports obtained during the 1999/2000 school year.

Year II: Changes in Strategies – Solidification and Standardization

Given that School B's SIP was not finalized until late in the 1997/98 school year, implementation of school improvement activities did not commence until the following fall. To implement a substantial number of far-reaching reforms focusing almost exclusively on improving the school's MSPAP scores, the principal drew extensively upon the positive working relationship he had established with teachers as a result of his long tenure at School B. Indeed, teachers report the school year as one that was dominated by preparations for MSPAP, with virtually all in-service opportunities, class schedules, curricula, and after school activities reoriented to reflect an emphasis on improved test scores.

Although some of these changes were welcome, others proved to be more controversial. In general, teachers welcomed the additional training opportunities, resources, and teacher support positions that came to the school as a result of its reconstitution-eligible status. However, new measures designed to promote teacher uniformity and accountability were not as widely praised.

As a result of the many changes at School B, teachers recount a year filled with higher than usual levels of stress and conflict. A number of teachers also reported being offended and/or overwhelmed by the new strategies and requirements directed their way. By the end of the school year, a full quarter of the teaching staff decided to leave the school. In explaining why so many teachers chose to leave, the school's Instructional Coordinator (IC) commented:

> They understood that, quite frankly, there would be someone breathing down their neck. And there already was, because there was just no choice about it at the time. There was no… in the beginning of that drastic of an implementation of all

> these new things, there is no other way to do it than to actually be in the room, making sure it is being done (B20).

While several teachers would most likely dispute her statement that no other implementation options were available to School B's leadership, they most definitely agreed that throughout the school year teachers were subjected to an unprecedented level of scrutiny by the administration.

Year III: Turmoil Subsides

The 1999/2000 school year began with many new, young teachers added to School B's faculty. This group of young teachers was described by one administrator as "really gung-ho and receptive and willing to try things" (B20). With those teachers who were unwilling to embrace School B's reform agenda now gone from the building, several teachers also remarked that the new faculty composition was much improved over that of prior years. Overall, teachers commented on high levels of collegiality and believed that the 1999/2000 staff was both more motivated and more willing to work together to provide an environment conducive to student learning.

However, while teachers reported that much of the prior year's overt conflict had subsided with the departure of the school's most disgruntled employees, they commented that high levels of stress brought on by the administration's close oversight of classroom activities still existed. The demands for continued high performance on the MSPAP by the administration remained unabated and many teachers privately chafed at the classroom standardization and accountability measures still being enforced. At the same time, a sizable minority expressed a level of contentment with a school organization that was committed to providing a level of consistency and orderliness in the classroom. Although they acknowledged the stress that sometimes came from the administration's close supervision, they believed it kept them "on their toes" (B6).

The 1999/2000 school year also marked the introduction of the school's comprehensive school reform model (CSRM), Co-Nect. Although, Co-Nect was anticipated to be the focal point of school activities for the 1999/2000 school year, the computers required to operationalize the program did not arrive until well after the winter break. Implementation of Co-Nect-related activities finally began late in the school year, with teachers assigning their students long-term group research projects. Although teachers sounded enthusiastic about the opportunity to do something other than MSPAP drilling, like most new activities implemented at School B, these projects were mandated by the administration.

Reaction to Probationary Status

Awareness/Initial Reaction

Among veteran teachers, initial reactions to the school's probationary status tended to vary depending on age and length of tenure. Those teachers with several years of service reported feeling "bad" (B2), "mortified," (B7) and "unsure" (B4). However, those who had been at School B for a shorter period did not report taking the news of School B's probationary status too personally. One teacher described herself as feeling "curious" and noted that she trusted the state to make the right decisions about what School B needed to do to improve (B1). Another believed probation was "deserved" (B3) because of the school's combination of low test scores, lack of parental involvement, and teacher inability to cope with low income students. Yet another distanced herself completely from the school's poor performance because she was a new arrival. Regarding this fact, she commented: "It didn't make me feel too bad, because of the fact that I wasn't here when the actual test was taken." (B8).

About half of the teachers interviewed for this study arrived at the school in the years after being declared reconstitution-eligible. The majority of these new teachers report that they willingly came to the school despite its reconstitution-eligible label, with many citing the school's challenging environment and racial composition as particular draws. However, two teachers reported they came to the school unaware of School B's status. One believes she might have changed her mind had she known the school was reconstitution-eligible.

Teachers generally acknowledged that there is a stigma associated with being reconstitution-eligible and disliked that they were perceived by "the public as being an underachieving school" (B1). Several teachers expressed concern that the label would hurt the school's students as they moved on to the high school level. However, with regard to how they believed probation impacted them personally, most teachers said that they were willing to put up with the stigma as long as it meant obtaining additional resources for the school. Yet at the same time, informants bemoaned the fact that it took the school's reconstitution-eligible status to receive the resources that they believe any school needs to succeed. One seventh grade teacher described this situation as "almost like being rewarded for not doing well." She went on to comment: "I think every school should have additional resources and instructional personnel that people can go to" (B9). Interestingly, although a number of teachers expressed their ambivalence about remaining at School B, none cited the stigma of working at a recon-eligible school as a reason why they would consider a move.

Threat

At School B, all teachers interviewed were aware that the school was on the state's list of reconstitution-eligible schools. They were also very aware that the school was under intense pressure to do well on MSPAP, with many noting that the principal was "consumed with MSPAP scores." However, teachers tended to be only vaguely aware of what reconstitution-eligibility might mean to the future of the school. While some supposed that the state could come in and take the school over, teachers did not have a strong idea about what would ensue.

Although several teachers interviewed for this case study believed that other teachers within the building were fearful of recon's repercussions, just one admitted to being personally worried for her job. The general consensus among teachers at School B was that reconstitution-eligibility threatens neither their current position nor their future career aspirations. Given the high demand for experienced teachers throughout the region, most believed they could easily find work elsewhere if need be. According to one teacher who was at the school when it was first placed on probation:

> Okay, I could lose my job here, but I'd go somewhere else and teach [subject]… that was the least of all my worries. I actually didn't think about that. I heard of some other schools where… teachers were forced to go out and move and stuff, but I was thinking to myself, if I've been doing what I've been doing, then I couldn't see myself being removed. (B2)

Virtually all teachers expressed great confidence in their teaching abilities. They felt well acquainted with content and, for the most part, believed that they worked well with their students. When surveyed, 91 percent of responding teachers believed themselves to be either adequately or very well prepared to teach their assignments. Because they were skilled educators, they did not believe that they would be removed. When asked about what they would like to learn, technology came up rather than tips on instruction.

The sense of threat or fear was also mitigated because so many teachers at School B have arrived in the period since the school was named reconstitution-eligible. Thus, they did not feel particularly responsible for its "predicament with the state." One teacher explained that she told other new teachers who had expressed concern over the school's probationary status that "we weren't here when it happened, so don't get upset by it" (B8). Further, a few teachers pointed to the school district's disappointing past experiences with zero-based staffing[4] for low performing schools as another reason why they do not fear a takeover. One teacher called this preemptive strike by the district to avoid state takeover as the "stupidest thing that was ever done." She further commented: "He [the superintendent] had all young new teachers over there. Nobody knew what they were doing" (B4). In fact, the county's use of zero-based staffing was not found to significantly alter student performance and was quickly abandoned as a school reform measure.

Interestingly, a few teachers interviewed for this research study actually commented that they preferred being at reconstitution-eligible schools because of the challenges they provide. Comparing teaching with medical school, this eighth grade teacher noted:

> They tell you that the best thing for you to do is go to the worst hospital where they have a lot of everything coming in so that you'll be able to work with less in order to be able to accomplish more. I think it's the same with education because if you start here in this setting, depending on the type of person you are, this can make it easier for you to go somewhere else..." (B3)

Although this sentiment was not shared by the majority of teachers, it does offer interesting insight into the possible confounding effects of probationary status on the teaching force. It also adds insight into educators' motivation to teach. Several teachers at School B, particularly African American male teachers, indicated a dedication to the school's particular population. This dedication to helping those children most in need frequently allowed them to transcend issues of personal threat and fear.

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[4] When zero-based staffing is employed, all teachers working at a given site are asked to resign and then are made to reapply for their jobs. In theory, only those best teachers are invited back. However, in this instance, many of the low-performing schools' best teachers sought positions elsewhere and an influx of new and inexperienced teachers replaced the cadre of experienced educators that previously worked at the schools.

While many teachers do not report being especially fearful of reconstitution as a threat to their career, the same cannot be said of the principal. The overwhelming majority of teachers who commented on the issue of threat and fear indicated that the school administration, particularly the principal, was quite fearful of the potential repercussions of the school's reconstitution-eligibility. For example, one seventh grade teacher describes the principal as "terrified... over the whole recon process" (B11). Another teacher characterized the principal as "downright passionate" about test scores (B15). Teachers understood that, in the eyes of the state, the principal bore the brunt of the blame for the school's status and that his fear was in many ways motivated by job security. As one teacher noted, to both the state and the outside world in general, the principal is the "face of recon" (B20).

Fairness

Despite a few dissenters, the majority of teachers at School B tended to believe that labeling School B "reconstitution-eligible" was generally unfair. As noted earlier, some believed that the precipitous MSPAP test score drop during the 1996/97 school year was an anomaly. Given School B's comparatively strong track record within the county, they did not believe a one-year downturn in scores warranted such extreme measures. Other teachers believed that naming School B to the "hit list" on the basis of MSPAP scores alone was unfair because test scores do not provide a true portrait of what several teachers believe is a dynamic learning environment. As one teacher noted: "that number really is not telling us all the children will be learning, in my opinion" (B10). Several teachers indicated that they would definitely send their children to School B and, as an indicator of her support, one teacher noted that her son was currently enrolled at School B.

More generally, while teachers acknowledge that they should in part be held accountable for student learning, they generally cite two reasons why they do not believe the MSPAP is an appropriate tool for gauging whether or not teachers are holding up their end of the educational bargain. First, teachers are frustrated by an assessment that does not in any way hold students accountable for their performance. As one teacher noted:

> I mean, if your children don't perform, you take the consequences when there's no consequences on the child not coming to school. There's not consequences on the parent. The accountability just can't be on the teacher. It has to be on the community, itself, and that's where the MSPAP is lacking. It doesn't hold parents and students accountable. It holds teachers accountable (B14).

Second, teachers do not believe that MSPAP takes into consideration the impact of poverty and poor preparation on students' scores. The vast majority of the students who come to School B from elementary school are not adequately prepared to learn what is expected of the average county middle schooler. An assessment conducted by the school in early fall, found that approximately 80 percent of all arriving sixth and seventh grade students read below grade level. Yet, despite their educational deficiencies, teachers at School B are held accountable for students being able to perform at the middle school level. One faculty member expressed his concern with what he perceives to be unrealistic state expectations in the following manner: "You can't honestly sit here and believe that in a year anybody's going to make [the students] rise up three, four grade levels. It just doesn't happen that way, so when you test that child, that child is not going to do as well" (B10).

Skepticism about MSPAP's ability to accurately portray teacher commitment and ability may help to explain why so few teachers at School B reported personally valuing their student's performance on the MSPAP test. In fact, just two teachers indicated that they tied their teaching ability to their students' MSPAP performance. About a third of teachers indicated that they valued high MSPAP scores not for any intrinsic reward but, rather, because School B's "reputation" depended on doing well. Summing up this sentiment, one teacher commented: "We have one of the most dynamic programs going on here, but if the scores are not saying that we can meet the standards, we're not doing anything" (B12). However, almost half of all teachers interviewed commented that they did not particularly value their student's performance on the MSPAP test. For them, it was more important "that individual students achieve, or realize some success within themselves" (B13).

While teachers may have doubted the relative fairness of using MSPAP to label schools as non-performing, a handful of teachers acknowledge that School B's "predicament" has provided a wake up call that has served to "tighten" instruction and "focus" MSPAP improvement strategies (B10/B12). As examples, teachers cite renewed efforts to use cooperative learning techniques, strategies to improve student writing skills, and MSPAP vocabulary in daily lessons. Teachers also cite increased pressure to be prepared and on task. Concerning this fact, one seventh grade teacher observed that "teachers are more responsible now. They know they are under the gun and they have to be prepared..." (B1). Another teacher noted that, as a result of probation, "things have really tightened up" at the school (B4). Yet another commented: "Now that you know that your boss is coming in to check on you, it makes you have your lesson plans and it makes you pull out that book every night and see what you're going to teach the next day" (B6).

Leadership

Endearingly referred to as "Doc" by his faculty and staff, the principal has been at School B for 18 years. Relating to School B's faculty and staff in a paternalistic way, he possesses a quiet, steady demeanor that is reminiscent of a stoic father or grandfather. He is generally described by teachers as easily approachable, willing to listen, and responsive to their needs. According to teachers, while he tries to use a consensual approach when making decisions, he always has the last say. Additionally, he is depicted as a man who personally ensures that those decisions, once made, are followed through. Reflecting findings from interviews, 72 percent of surveyed teachers viewed the principal as "supportive and encouraging" and 69 percent characterized him as being responsible for setting priorities, making plans, and seeing that they are carried out. As a result, his leadership style is described as being generally top-down.

Although low-key by nature, many teachers who had been at the school for a number of years noted a striking change in his intensity level as a result of the school's reconstitution-eligible status. The principal, himself, notes that he took the news very personally and described himself as feeling as though he had "failed" as an educator. Contributing to this sense of failure was the knowledge that members of the State Department of Education had actively sought to have him removed from his post as principal. Luckily, allies within the county administration blocked this move. However, he began his tenure as a recon-eligible principal understanding that his future as principal of School B hinged on MSPAP improvement.

Thus, his future hanging in the balance, he made it his overriding concern to raise test scores at the school. The principal observed that from the very beginning he took an inclusive approach with his staff and tried to keep them informed about "what was coming down the road" with regard to how reconstitution-eligibility would impact the school. Throughout this process of notifying staff and community members, he attempted to put forth a positive face and sought to reinforce the "advantages" of the school's new status, namely that the school would receive additional funds and technical assistance. According to the principal, his first step was to bring in key members of the school's faculty and PTA to tell them that he saw no sense in "fighting" the situation. At the same time, he asked for their assistance in moving forward to implement the school improvement procedures that had been laid out by the state. He also sought their help in broadcasting this message to others at the school.

Indeed, in the ensuing years, rather than resisting School B's reconstitution-eligible status, the principal has fully embraced the school improvement process. Teachers report that reconstitution-eligibility has made the principal much more interested in what is going on inside their classrooms. In fact, a full 89 percent of teachers surveyed found that as a result of reconstitution-eligibility they have received more attention from the administration. The principal is now known to make weekly visits to teacher's rooms to observe lessons and ensure compliance with school reform measures. During these visits he evaluates teacher's performance using a checklist system. Those found to be not in compliance receive memos in their boxes the next day. The teachers at School B, who appear to have previously enjoyed a relatively high level of autonomy within the classroom, noted that the new intrusive policies are stressful. Regarding this fact, one teacher commented:

> Since we've been reconstituted [sic], it's like everything is MSPAP. Very MSPAP oriented. We're being watched. I have to have my objective, my warm-up on the board, which I always did anyway. If before he might not have been pushing everybody, now it's the other extreme. (B4)

At the same time, the principal has also authorized his administrative support staff, including the Instructional Coordinator, the Master Teacher, and the School Improvement

Resource Teacher (SIRT), to be a very visible presence in teachers' classrooms. Highly skilled and generally well regarded, these teachers are responsible for the majority of the day-to-day teacher/administrator interactions that occur at School B. They are frequently found observing classrooms, meeting with teachers, and providing in-service training opportunities. These three administrative support personnel were mainly responsible for overseeing the enactment of the many school improvement activities in which the school engaged. Although cooperative measures were utilized to develop the SIP activities, the day-to-day enforcement of their implementation was largely placed in the hands of these three staff members. While the Instructional Coordinator bemoaned this "negative way to operate" (B20) she believed that without the administration's follow-up, the SIP's school improvement measures would languish.

In particular, the IC has taken on many of the principal's oversight activities. For example, she co-chairs weekly team meetings with the principal and reviews faculty lesson plans (known as DTAs) for alignment with the SIP. Although liked by the majority of the staff, she is also viewed as the principal's agent. Complicating her already delicate task was the fact that just the year before she had been a classroom English teacher at School B. Now she was being asked to supervise her fellow colleagues in the implementation of policies that impinged on teachers' traditional norms of classroom autonomy. As she noted, this was a difficult transition:

> … a disadvantage to me was that I had been a teacher the year before and here I come back in August and suddenly I can come in and say, "so what's going on in here?" That kind of thing. So last year was probably a little bit trickier than it has been. People are very… it was unknown to them that that was my position. The School Improvement Resource Teacher had been here as a teacher too, so it was a little tricky last year. You had to go slowly and you know, kind of establish a new type of rapport with everyone. (B20)

Though her non-threatening demeanor and cheerful disposition eased her transition into a supervisory role, not all teachers were open to heightened scrutiny at the hands of their former peer. For example, one science teacher specifically expressed that she was initially upset when she found out that "someone from the English department" was "grading" her lesson plan and making suggestions about her content. As she expressed: "Someone from the English department could not read my DTA and tell me that investigation or exploration was not a good verb or adjective to use..." (B11).

Indeed, many teachers privately grumbled about their need to comply with numerous administrative mandates. However, although this grumbling was at times loud, compliance appeared to be relatively high. The following quote, from perhaps one of School B's most outspoken teachers, exhibits the reluctant acquiescence of many teachers. Concerning the administrative mandate that DTAs be completed on a daily basis, she commented:

> I've stayed under authority, they're on my desk. Now, maybe one or two days, I don't write them out. But I'm sorry, it's just too much. But for the most, you can look in my notebook and I have plans for every day. It's just... there's got to be another way just to make the staff accountable for lesson plans, other than making me have to sit down and write out my DTA. (B9)

Despite teachers' misgivings, the administration's authority did not appear to be outwardly challenged by any of the staff present in the building during the 1999/2000 school year. For example, not one instance of open confrontation or disagreement was observed at any of the six team meetings attended by research team members. One teacher of unusually long standing attributed the high level of teacher conformity to School B's large number of new teachers. As she commented, "there are so many young teachers now... there is nobody to oppose [the principal]" (B4). She believed that if the building was filled with more experienced teachers, he wouldn't have been able to push through so many changes so quickly. Indeed, the open conflict between the administration and faculty members that led to the departure of many highly experienced teachers during the school's first post-probationary year serves to confirm this sentiment.

Interestingly, while several of School B's teachers expressed disdain for many of the new measures implemented by the principal and his administrative team, most did not express dislike for the principal, himself. In fact, a striking number of teachers commented that "Doc" had played a large role in their decision to stay on at School B despite their various grievances, most notably the high level of stress brought on by heightened teacher accountability. In fact, the principal has proven adept at deflecting responsibility for the numerous pedagogical interventions and teacher accountability measures instituted at the school since being named reconstitution-eligible. For example, while one teacher described the principal's classroom inspections as not making her feel "very professional" (B6), at the same she characterized him as "nice" and "warm" (B6).

He has succeeded in diffusing teacher ire in many respects by playing the role of the reluctant enforcer. As one teacher noted, the state "is putting a huge amount of pressure on him and he in turn puts huge amounts of pressure on the teachers" (B4). On more than one occasion, the principal was observed invoking the threat of the state to reinforce the importance of adhering to the school's SIP. Indeed, at a meeting attended by the research team, he reinforced the use of weekly writing prompts by exhorting the teachers not to "lose focus" of the fact that the state required test score improvement for three consecutive years.

These weekly team meetings, conducted in the principal's rather cramped office, are the only faculty meetings that regularly take place at School B. While the meetings are viewed by the administration as mini in-service opportunities where teachers are provided with tips and strategies for improving student performance on MSPAP related tasks, teachers perceive their function at least in part as a means to "check up" on their performance. One teacher describes the principal's strategy as follows:

> During weekly team meetings, if you haven't... if you've dropped the ball, he will let you know. He doesn't call you out individually, but within the group he will emphasize more. Say it's the seventh graders' teachers, he will emphasize it more with the seventh grade teachers than he will with the eighth graders. Let you know specifically, you dropped the ball. (B12)

In fact, the research group observed this pattern of interaction on multiple occasions. For example, at one team meeting the principal was observed reminding a particularly recalcitrant group of teachers of their obligation to incorporate Co-Nect into their lesson planning. In his speech to them, he "wanted to make the point clear" that Co-Nect and classroom instruction should not be viewed as two separate entities. In a debriefing session afterwards, teachers pointed to this type of behavior as an example of how the weekly gatherings are used by the administration to monitor and promote compliance among individual teaching teams. That the meetings are conducted in the principal's office only reinforces their accountability bent to the teachers.

In summary, the principal has relied on his long tenure, his supportive nature, and an "us vs. them" strategy to ensure compliance with some rather invasive reform measures ostensibly implemented to upgrade MSPAP performance. In response, teachers report feeling as though they are constantly being watched and must be on guard at all times. While outright subordination among teachers remains in check, evidence of underlying stress and resentment of the administration's new practices is definitely present among School B's faculty. One teacher summed up the school's post-recon environment in the following way:

> The atmosphere has changed. Teachers are more on guard... Stress levels have risen, you know, as a result of feeling pressured to meet quota standards and that kind of thing... I think people feel like if the school wasn't recon-eligible, we wouldn't have

> to… write out [lesson plans] everyday or do objectives everyday, you know. Whether we would or not, you don't know for sure, but I think people feel a lot of changes like that are a result… So they feel on edge a lot, too, because of the scrutiny, right, to always be on guard, to redo and do again and redo. (B13)

Collegiality

While the relationship between School B's teachers and administrators was often marked by underlying tensions, the same cannot be said about the relationships forged between teachers. The majority of teachers reported that they enjoyed working with their colleagues in what they describe as a warm and supportive collegial environment. Peers were described as sources of strength that helped teachers to cope with the stress of working at School B. As one teacher noted: "My colleagues… carry me along, they… take care of me" (B1). When surveyed, 76 percent of teachers reported that positive relationships with colleagues played a role in their decision to stay at School B.

Teacher unity was described as being quite high, particularly when contrasted both with teachers' past experiences at School B as well as at other schools. When reflecting upon her past experiences at School B, a sixth grade teacher commented:

> I think this year compared to last year, I think once again, that's another one hundred and fifty percent turnaround. I think last year there were some bad apples and, not bad apples in terms of their teaching style, but bad apples in terms of their personalities, really understanding, "OK this is what we've got to do. This is your job." (B8)

A seventh grade teacher who had recently transferred to School B from another reconstitution-eligible school commented that she was surprised the faculty had remained so united in light of School B's probationary status. According to her, recon had "broken the spirit" of the staff at her previous school (B9). However, at School B, she had only encountered teachers "trying to do what's best" for their students (B9).

With very few exceptions, teachers universally praised the ability and dedication of their colleagues. "We all work equally hard," observed one teacher when asked about her fellow team members (B1). Another teacher characterized her peers as "content, very supportive, and energetic about what they do" (B8). Several teachers remarked that teacher collegiality was markedly improved over that of past years. In addition, several comments were made concerning the staff's improved ability to work with what they termed a "challenging" student population. Regarding this fact, one eighth grade teacher commented:

> I believe that because of the population, the teachers that we have in this building are perfect for it, and I don't think that every teacher works in every building. It's a mixture. It's a mixture... that we have now that we didn't have two years ago. (B10)

For teachers at School B, meaningful collegial interactions did not generally extend much beyond their fellow team members. School strategies implemented to promote team unity, such as common planning time and weekly team meetings in lieu of school-wide faculty meetings, appear to have simultaneously impeded significant cross-team interactions within the building. Most teachers commented that they were generally unfamiliar with the methods and practices of other teams. Some teachers reported feeling isolated by School B's team emphasis and others expressed a desire for more regularized content area interactions. However, most seemed to accept their limited peer interactions as unproblematic. Undoubtedly, teachers' willingness to forego additional faculty exchanges stems from their fervent desire to keep meetings to an absolute minimum, lest they impinge on scarce planning time that is already taken up in large part by meetings with the principal and student and parent conferences.

The majority of collegial interactions at School B could be characterized as generally informal in nature. Teachers indicated that they neither observed their peers in instructional situations nor offered unsolicited suggestions concerning matters of instruction. Because School

B's Master Teacher is responsible for monitoring the performance of novice teachers, faculty mentoring appears to occur on an unofficial basis only. However, new teachers commented that the senior staff had proven quite willing to lend assistance when asked.

As a group, outside of the weekly team meetings run by the administration, teams tended to meet sporadically, with most communication occurring informally in the hallway or over lunch. During these gatherings, teachers reported spending a majority of this time talking about student performance and discipline. According to teachers, discussions concerning curricular issues or instructional strategies were not common occurrences. Indeed, while teachers at School B were the recipients of many in-service trainings given by administrators and outside specialists, teachers made no mention of instances where they were asked to share their expertise with their colleagues in any systematic manner. Some teachers bemoaned this lack of meaningful opportunity for formal collegial interactions. Concerning this fact, one teacher stated:

> Something that I would like to see implemented would be more collaboration among the teachers, in a, in sort of a cross-curriculum way, sharing of ideas mainly to observe one another. I mean, I think if we could have more interaction, other than casual passing through, that that could possibly help to build us… because there are some very strong, experienced teachers and a lot of times teachers just don't get an opportunity to talk to their colleagues about what they're doing, and see, and actually see how they do it. (B13)

At School B, very few teachers appeared to be engaged in the type of cross-curriculum collaboration described above. For example, out of the 20 teachers interviewed, just one mentioned that her team was planning to work together to develop a "banner question" that would be used as an instructional focal point across the team's various content areas. Instead, collegial relationships among School B's teachers tended to be founded on a variety of informal interactions that stopped short of the classroom door.

The School Improvement Plan

School B's involvement with developing and implementing its school improvement plan (SIP) provides a telling story of a school that made an earnest attempt to garner widespread teacher involvement in the initial development of its SIP. Virtually all accounts detail a situation in which the school embarked upon an open process that was teacher-driven. However, the high stakes nature of the school's reconstitution-eligible status, characterized by extreme pressure placed on the principal to increase MSPAP scores, led the administration, rather than the teaching staff, to take primary responsibility for overseeing the implementation of SIP activities.

The school's first major challenge under reconstitution-eligibility was to develop a school improvement plan (SIP). This plan was meant to serve as an outline for the school's goals and activities relating to MSPAP improvement. In writing the plan, School B's administration endeavored to garner wide participation among various stakeholders. Among the administration, it was hoped that this inclusive process would result in a meaningful and practical plan that could be used as a guide for implementing new activities aimed at raising MSPAP scores. Teachers and administrators, alike, report the involvement of a large number of staff members in what was described as a "tedious" and "difficult" six-month process that came to dominate the second semester of the 1997/98 school year.

Convened with the specific purpose of drafting the SIP, the school improvement team was comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, and even one student representative from the student government association. According to reports, membership was open to everyone and wide participation was encouraged. While the school improvement team was comprised of many people, a smaller group took on the responsibility for the actual writing of the SIP. Divided into approximately six groups, the SIP writers were tasked with collecting data and then drafting the findings for their assigned section that corresponded to a template provided by the district. Most of the writing was undertaken by the SIP team on weekends and was then presented to the principal and faculty for comments and suggestions during the school improvement team's weekly meetings. According to SIP writers, this feedback would then be incorporated into subsequent versions of the plan. One teacher characterized the iterative writing process in the following manner:

> ...we'd get the information from the big group, bring it to the small group, work it out individual, kind of put it in.... get that back, give that to the core group, small group, break it down, individual puts it in the system in the order that it needs to be put in. (B12)

Although not a writer himself, the principal frequently visited the SIP team on weekends to show his support for their efforts.

According to the administration, strategies included in the SIP plans were "led by the numbers," meaning that a detailed analysis of MSPAP data was conducted to identify those areas where the school had performed poorly. The strategies devised by the school improvement team sought to directly address these identified weaknesses. Given that reading and writing contribute to the scores for all testing domains, a strategic decision was made by the school to focus on activities that would improve students' skills in these two key areas.

Faculty and administration members, alike, commented that the greatest frustrations encountered during the SIP writing process came as a result of the lack of clear communication between the state and county offices responsible for the oversight of reconstitution-eligible schools. Their frequently conflicting responses to school inquires about the SIP content and format caused great confusion among school improvement team members. They believed that unclear guidelines led to SIP pieces being returned to the school for revision on multiple occasions. The school's frustration with the conflicting directives was described by one teacher in the following manner:

> ...during this constant revision of different parts, different people seemed to contradict what the other said... the county people say yes, then the state people say no, or even the state office representative will say yes, but then the head chief gets it, says no. And that was very frustrating the first year because it seemed like... everybody was trying to figure out what everybody wanted, and they would change what they wanted from week to week. (B12)

As a result, School B felt as though it was left "stabbing in the dark" in its effort to complete the plan. Nonetheless, administrators believe they did "the best they could" given the trying circumstances.

The SIP plan developed by School B's staff included detailed information concerning testing data, perceived needs, and strategies for school improvement. Virtually all activities in the SIP were oriented towards improvement on the MSPAP and Maryland Functional tests. In particular, a wide variety of activities that attempted to enhance students' reading and writing skills were highlighted. Subsequent school improvement plans have been streamlined and modified to include new school improvement activities such as Co-Nect but they continue to utilize generic test taking strategies, standardization of classroom practices, staff training, and technology as a means to address School B's persistently low reading and writing scores.

One notable change, however, has been the constant revision of school MSPAP goals from year to year. The initial 1998/99 SIP established a goal of 70 percent satisfactory on all MSPAP categories by the year 2003. However, by the following year's SIP, School B's stated goal for the MSPAP test was simply to reach the state average by the year 2002, a significantly lower mark. The third SIP developed for the 2000/01 school year is interesting in that it establishes more personalized benchmarks for the school concerning MSPAP achievement, with some goals well below the state average (i.e. math) and others well above (i.e. language usage). In interviews, teachers found the lowered expectations to be more realistic and they were optimistic that they could be obtained within the stipulated timeframe. However, the fact that most teachers were unfamiliar with School B's composite index score and where it stood in relation to state and county averages indicates a lack of internalization of SIP goals as far as they relate to MSPAP.

Interestingly, although a number of teachers admitted that they had not yet read the plan, most were quite familiar with its contents. When asked what was in the SIP, most were able to list off a variety of interventions such as the reading lab, staff development workshops, various test taking strategies, after school activities, and the Co-Nect program. Teachers explained that their familiarity with the plan was the result of continuous efforts by the administration and school improvement staff to implement and enforce planned activities. As one teacher noted, the school improvement plan was "tattooed in our minds" by the administration (B11). Another teacher commented that they were regularly "inundated with the school improvement plan" (B12) during weekly team meetings. In fact, during a meeting observed by members of the research team, the Instructional Coordinator spent the majority of the time demonstrating how to implement the "before, during, and after" reading method highlighted in that year's SIP as strategy for improving School B's low MSPAP reading scores.

In general, teachers agreed with the concept of writing school improvement plans and thought the process brought heightened awareness to the school's various needs. Overall, they were conscious of the fact that the activities in their school's SIP was primarily meant to raise test scores and many appreciated that the SIP helped to orient the staff and teachers around common goals. As one teacher put it: "We know that we have a mission. The mission is defined. The carrot, so to speak is right there. We just have to get it" (B10).

Most teachers believed that the SIP made sense. However, because of its emphasis on building language and reading skills, some teachers of other subjects (particularly math and science) found it to be less pertinent to them. Although they noted their support of school improvement and indicated their use of MSPAP words and skills in lesson planning, they fundamentally felt as though the SIP plan was directed towards English teachers. Regarding SIP's limited applicability to her subject (math), one teacher commented: "I know there are certain percentages [of students] that are supposed to pass the benchmarks. But that's all I know right now that involves me personally in the classroom… because the focus here, currently is reading/language arts" (B9). This perception also reflects the teachers' generally narrow conception of the role they played in implementing the school improvement plan, which generally revolved around them doing their job and employing the activities they perceived to be relevant to the subjects they teach. When asked about her role in school improvement, the following quote by a seventh grade teacher was indicative of many teachers' responses: "I think my part is just to do what I do and to just make sure I do it right or try to do it well" (B15).

Concerning the SIP implementation, teachers seemed compliant and generally receptive to the various test taking and instructional strategies and professional development opportunities offered in the plan. Yet they did not seem particularly motivated to operationalize school improvement beyond the parameters of their jobs. Indeed, a wider conception of responsibility for school improvement outside of their immediate role as classroom teacher was not commonly found among the teachers at School B. However, given that responsibility for the overwhelming majority of all SIP action plan activities rested in the hands of administrative staff members, it does not appear that School B's administrators reached out to teachers to have a more participatory role in the implementation process. Indeed, one administrative staff member characterized the implementation of the school's SIP as "top-down" (B20).

The administration's encouragement of widespread teacher involvement also appears to have been lacking in the development of School B's subsequent SIPs. Reflective of the school's tightened administrative control over matters of curriculum and instruction, the school's second and third SIPs (for the 1999/2000 and 2000/01 school years, respectively) were developed with significantly less teacher and community involvement. According to teachers, these plans were largely written by the School Improvement Resource Teacher and then offered in draft form to the school improvement team for comments and feedback. This process contrasts sharply with the very inclusive, teacher-driven process utilized during the development of the initial plan in 1998, and some teachers regretted not having the opportunity to participate in deeper discussions about the effectiveness of SIP activities and directions for School B's future. Regarding her reduced role in the SIP development process, one teacher commented: "I understand… what [the School Improvement Resource Teacher's] role is, but at the same time I felt that it still should have been open within 'OK what worked? Where do you think we should go from here? How do we need to focus on those models that maybe weren't completed?'" (B12).

When asked what was lacking in the SIP, teachers frequently mentioned student involvement in the school improvement process. Among teachers, there was a realization that without bringing students on board, their efforts to improve test scores were futile. As one teacher commented: "…until they see a way around to make it mean something to the child, they can hold me accountable for days" (B9). In her opinion, the school's greatest challenge is making school improvement relevant to children:

> …how do you bring that process to the classroom? In other words, you know, how do you make students see the point of the process? What does it mean to them? How can we bring that to their level? You know, it's a ten-step process and I know how teachers can take it to adults. But how do we bring that to the students? (B9)

In fact, multiple teachers expressed concerns that the activities in the SIP were boring and not designed to garner student motivation. For one teacher, this concern was enough to drive her to become a member of the school improvement team. She noted: "…you know last year, it was like work, work, work, work. And it was nothing… I didn't see where it was so child centered. Coming from elementary school, we have so many programs there and [now] we're pulling some of those" (B5). These sentiments about the SIP and student involvement very much mirror the overall complaint the teachers have with the overall accountability system utilized by the state of Maryland: that teachers are held accountable for implementing activities to promote student test score achievement without concomitant efforts to motivate students or make them value MSPAP outcomes.

Strategies

Since being named reconstitution-eligible, School B has implemented several wide-ranging strategies aimed specifically at improving MSPAP performance. An in-depth analysis of MSPAP data conducted by the school's Instructional Coordinator served to focus the selection of these school improvement strategies. Her careful study of School B's MSPAP data allowed her to recognize some recurrent student testing weaknesses which she then translated into a set of generic instructional strategies that are tailored to the test and applicable across the curriculum. The school's intensive focus on MSPAP was affirmed by the Instructional Coordinator when she noted: "…I could very confidently say that MSPAP is driving every single action and thought in this building" (20).

These strategies are set out in detail in School B's annual school improvement plan. While the administration believes that these strategies also contribute to "solid instruction," (B20) their primary purpose, as the SIP clearly notes, is unquestionably to increase students' test scores. These strategies fall into five general categories: test preparation activities, classroom standardization, resource infusions, staff development, and schedule modifications.

Test preparation activities

Teacher in-service trainings and weekly team meetings provided the settings for instruction in generic test taking strategies that virtually all teachers have incorporated into their daily lessons. These strategies are designed to promote student acquisition of skills that are needed to do well on the MSPAP test such as writing persuasive arguments and answering reading comprehension questions in paragraph form. Two of the most prominent strategies to enhance these skills are known as RAS and FEAT. RAS stands for "restate, answer, support" and FEAT stands for " for example/according to." Using these "tricks," (B20) teachers instruct students in how to structure responses so that they meet MSPAP grading standards. One teacher explains the process in the following manner:

> Now I am just trying to teach some strategies here for the MSPAP. I know that when they grade the MSPAP, it is an assembly line process. And I am thinking, I am just personally thinking then if they see a good topic sentence on these sentences, that would help squeeze some points for us. (B19)

Certainly not all teachers have taken their instruction to this extreme. However, several teachers conveyed their sentiment that the school has become much more "test focused" (B3, B6, B20) at the expense of subject content. In fact, the school's tremendous emphasis on strategies is made evident in the thick instructional handbook developed by the Instructional Coordinator. This handbook, filled with a veritable alphabet soup of tips and pointers designed to orient instruction towards building MSPAP skills, was distributed to every teacher in the building at the beginning of the 1999/2000 school year. Concerning the handbook's purpose, the Instructional Coordinator commented: "The kind of work that is happening here is naming skills, very specific skills that can be applied to each content. Content specific skills? No" (B20). Most teachers reported that they believed the strategies to be helpful in the classroom and their use was widely observed during classroom observations. In fact, 92 percent of School B teachers surveyed reported utilizing new instructional methods in their classrooms as a result of the school's reconstitution-eligible status.

While teachers reported their satisfaction with many of the new strategies brought to the school after being placed on probation, several expressed concern that the constant focus on MSPAP reduced their ability to teach the basic competency skills they believe their students need. Concerning this issue, one sixth grade teacher commented that the state "is trying to get higher order thinking when the kids are having hard enough time with the basic skills. They're making kids jump levels and they're missing a lot in the middle… missing the foundation" (B14). When asked about this issue, 70 percent of those teachers surveyed believe that teaching to the MSPAP requires them to neglect skills that are needed by their students. Indeed, the inherent conflict in the state's requirement that students must be equally well prepared for both the MSPAP and the Maryland Functional tests did not go unnoticed by teachers. As one seventh grade teacher noted: "…we have the functionals through the state, which are all multiple choice and basic. And then [the students] have MSPAP next year. So what do you want me to prepare for? You can't teach kids one way, and give them a different format" (B9).

Standardization of classroom practices and lesson planning

Since being named reconstitution-eligible, School B's administration has worked hard to create what it considers to be a consistent learning environment for its students. This consistency has been built around the establishment of uniform practices for classroom teachers governing lesson planning, pedagogy, and classroom appearance. Examples of these standardized practices include the following: that lesson plans promoting the acquisition of MSPAP skills be written daily and collected weekly for administrative review; that course objectives, warm-up, and closure activities be written daily on the blackboard; that timers be used to time student classroom activities; and that student materials and MSPAP words/rubrics be hung on classroom walls and changed regularly.

As noted earlier, this standardization was met with mixed reviews. Some teachers believed that consistency was helpful because it allowed students to become familiar with a uniform set of expectations. As one teacher noted: "This administration is trying to get things together, they are trying to have all teachers on one accord and not be on 'I'm doing my thing, you do your thing. I'm doing mine, you do yours.' And we are working on that; trying to get a cohesiveness" (B2). However, other teachers resisted these measures, with one teacher even going so far as to consider the uniformity as potentially damaging to students: "I think that seeing it done more than one way fosters creativity in a kid. I mean if you're saying this is the way to do it, this is the way, and then they fall into that. Then you don't have those kids with powered perspectives" (B10).

In general, though, teacher resistance was primarily grounded in their dislike of the increased administrative oversight that accompanied the push for uniformity. Indeed, the administration's new "drop-in" policy to ensure compliance caused a fair amount of controversy among School B's teaching corps. One teacher describes her objection the inspection process in the following manner:

> A lot of times we feel we're being watched all the time. Which is kind of insulting, especially with people who have been teaching for twenty years... Now all of a sudden they have to write up these picayune little lesson plans, and they have to have certain things on the walls. Not that the kids read them or anything, but you know, it's just another thing that we're required to do, another thing that's going to take up our time. (B16)

In interviews, several teachers expressed feeling stressed about the fact that they might be "caught with [their] pants down" during these inspections (B11). As one teacher noted:

> You never know when the principal is going to come and check the DTA. He checks to make sure it's completed. Makes sure that the correct date is on there. He's making sure that it's different basically every day. He wants papers up... graded papers, corrected class work, corrected homework on the board and on the walls. And he's checking for different posters we should have up to enrich the kids. I think he's checking for timers, making sure we're using the timers and making sure that we're closing the lesson. (B6)

In particular, teachers worried about the fact that they were expected to have a different DTA each day, complete with new objectives and activities, despite their personal belief that their students may need to focus on the same work for more than one day.

Resource infusion

As a result of its probationary status, School B was the recipient of approximately $180,000 in school improvement funds. While the money has been used to fund additional library books and after school activities, it has been primarily used to finance additional faculty positions (the School Improvement Resource Teacher, Instructional Coordinator, Master Teacher, and Academy of Reading Teacher) and technological resources such as the Academy of Reading Lab and computers for the Co-Nect comprehensive school reform model. Virtually all teachers were aware that the school had been the recipient of a large amount of funding and they responded positively to the variety of new resources, particularly the Master Teacher whom teachers view as exceptionally helpful. However, as mentioned earlier, they expressed regret that the school needed to be declared reconstitution-eligible in order to obtain them.

The addition of computers and the purchasing of the Co-Nect reform package have taken up the lion's share of the recon funds. Co-Nect, which focuses on the incorporation of technology, computers, and open-ended projects into the existing school curriculum, is a $60,000 annual expense. As noted earlier, although anticipated to be the centerpiece of school reform measures for the 1999/2000 school year, the program's computers were not purchased and installed until the second semester. According to those interviewed, the delay was initially caused by the county's incoming school superintendent who refused to release school funds until she had conducted a detailed review of the school system's 1999/2000 budget. The computers were further delayed when the vendor with whom the school had placed their order suddenly stopped doing business with the county because its account had fallen into arrears.

Despite the fact that the computers did not arrive until late in the school year, the administration moved forward with all scheduled Co-Nect in-service activities for teachers. This proved to be a controversial action among School B's faculty. While most teachers noted their interest in being able to incorporate technology into the classroom, they found it difficult to incorporate Co-Nect's strategies without internet access. As such, the trainings were viewed my many teachers as simply a waste of their time. As one teacher stated: "To be honest with you, I don't see [Co-Nect] being implemented at all here" (B11). Another put it more bluntly when she commented:

> Co-Nect right now is a waste of time for the teachers. Without the computers in the classroom, we don't understand why we're meeting with Co-Nect. It's hard to take

> your class down to the library and get on the computers. What they expect us to do is not realistic. (B14)

Interestingly, while Co-Nect actually encompasses a variety of activities in addition to the use of classroom computers such as project-based instruction and portfolio assessment, in interviews, teachers focused almost exclusively on its technological aspects. While teachers remained enthusiastic about the potential opportunity to incorporate computers and the internet into their classrooms, only time will tell if Co-Nect will be able to be integrated into curriculum or if it is destined to remain the poorly-aligned add on activity that some teachers criticized it for being.

Indeed, one bright spot for Co-Nect was the year-end implementation of long-term Co-Nect group projects by some teachers. According to teachers, these projects focusing on high-interest topics such as the portrayal of teens in the media proved to be very popular with the students. However, it is telling that these teachers were directed to implement these creative group projects designed to promote higher order thinking skills only after the completion of that year's MSPAP examinations.

Staff development opportunities

One of School B's primary school improvement strategies is the upgrading of teacher skills through staff development opportunities. In this effort, the Master Teacher has taken the lead on supervising teacher's classroom instruction. Known to drop in into classrooms on an informal basis, she provided tips and strategies concerning methods for improving teaching techniques. She is also responsible for closely supervising new staff. She is reported to provide helpful information and her work has been widely lauded by teachers and administrators alike. Each Wednesday afternoon, she offers teacher training sessions covering diverse topics such as how to write a lesson plan, classroom management, and active learning strategies. Many of the more experienced teachers noted the decidedly "new teacher" bent to these in-services. As one experienced teacher noted: "The professional development that we have... I believe is working tremendously, especially with the younger teachers..." (B10). While these teachers applauded the school's efforts to assist new teachers, they were at times frustrated with the perceived lack of opportunity to upgrade their own skills during these sessions. In addition, some teachers expressed frustration with the lack of focus on content. One such teacher noted:

> ...we have several workshops here and they're mainly on lesson planning, long-range planning, but it is for all of the content and doesn't really focus on that one subject, like social studies for example. It doesn't focus on one particular subject matter as far as things that you can take to your class (B6).

In addition to these teacher training sessions offered by the Master Teacher, weekly team meetings are also used by the administration for instructional purposes. At these meetings, teachers are provided information concerning a variety of classroom strategies they can utilize to promote reading and writing skills across content areas. For example, during one team meeting the research group observed a lesson by the Instructional Coordinator in the use of the "before, during, and after" reading strategy which asks students to think critically about what it is they read. So as to promote the utilization of this strategy, the Instructional Coordinator provided teachers with laminated bookmarks to be distributed to students to keep with them for all of their reading assignments.

Schedule modification

As a means to combat students' chronically low reading levels, School B implemented a 90-minute Language Arts period for seventh grade students during the 1999/2000 school year. This scheduling change meant that approximately 10 minutes was shaved off the class time of other seventh grade subjects and reflects School B's emphasis on improving the reading and writing skills of the vast majority of its students who enter seventh grade reading below grade level. Teachers of other subjects expressed frustration with this schedule change because, despite the shorter class periods, they were still expected to cover the same curriculum.

In addition, to accommodate the introduction of the Academy of Reading lab, seventh grade comprehensive teachers were assigned an additional class period. Because the lab only accommodates 15 students at a time, each class must be split in two with half going to the reading lab and half going to an extra enrichment reading period. While teachers report positive outcomes as a result of students' use of the lab, some reported feeling ill-equipped to teach reading. Others felt that the 20-minute enrichment period was too short for them to teach meaningful lessons. As a result, teachers commented that the classroom portion of the period tended to be of little use for the students. Regarding this fact, one frustrated teacher commented:

> That is a good concept, but what happens is I'm actually a babysitter for reading. Because half of my class goes to the reading lab for 15 or 20 minutes, so they leave, they go there, they come back. The other half goes down, and there is no way that I'm teaching reading… there's a true interruption in my lesson (if I had one) but I don't bother to do one because it's just not good. (B11)

Despite these frustrations, the 2000/01 SIP indicated that the modified schedule would continue.

Conclusion

Throughout the school, teachers acknowledged that the various strategies employed by School B in response to its probationary status brought quite a change to their daily classroom practices. Virtually all teachers reported that curriculum was revamped, new instructional methods were being used, and new educational programs were implemented. In particular, the use of generic instructional strategies developed to enhance MSPAP performance was highlighted as a new change. Also as a result of the school's reconstitution-eligible status, teachers noted that they were the recipients of new technology, additional classroom resources, and staff development opportunities.

Under the watchful eye of the principal and his administrative team, a full 84 percent of teachers surveyed believed that the administration had tightened procedures in the wake of School B's reconstitution-eligibility. While teachers may have debated the desirability of this newfound vigilance, they generally agreed that they felt increasingly pressured by the administration to improve students' test scores.

Indeed, in the years following the school's placement on the state's probationary list, School B substantially improved its MSPAP performance. However, this improvement has stagnated recently and questions remain as to whether continued incremental growth is possible. Of note is the fact that despite School B's notable improvement, its test scores still remain well below the state's desired 70 percent satisfactory passing rate.

The extent to which School B's various school improvement strategies will ultimately be successful in raising test scores is a matter of debate within the school. While most teachers believe the strategies have prompted them to work harder and take MSPAP more seriously, the majority still places responsibility for the poor performance of their students outside of the school. Teachers' persistent sense that their students are the victims of the conditions under which they have been raised rather than the victims of bad teaching may ultimately mitigate against them making the substantive school-level changes that would be required if School B is to meet the state's performance expectations.

SCHOOL C

by Lea Plut-Pregelj

Background/Organization

School C, an elementary School was built in the late 1960s in a new residential neighborhood, which began to develop after 1950 at the edge of a large East Coast metropolitan area. The neighborhood of modest homes intended for veterans of World War II and the Korean War reached its peak during the 1960s and early 1970s. The development slowed down in the 1980s and the racial structure of the low middle-class neighborhood began change from mixed to predominantly African American. During the 1980s and 1990s, the low income African American population began to grow steadily in the area. Despite the population growth, there were no new elementary schools built in the neighborhood in the last two decades. Official data dealing with urban planning of the wider neighborhood and published in the mid 1990s, stated that all the elementary schools in the area were overcrowded. At the same time, it was projected that all elementary schools would severely exceed their capacity by the year 2000, one third of them by much as 150 percent.[1] This prediction came true for School C. Built for about 350 elementary students, School C was overcrowded for several years. In January 1998, when the school was put on probation, it had 651 students. Overflow students were housed in several temporaries behind the school. In 1997/98 there were 13 such temporaries at School C.

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[1] The Heights: Public Information Brochure, The Maryland National Capitol Park and Planning Commission, PG County, June 1996, Planning Area 76 A, no page, See section Public schools.

Table 1 - School Enrolment

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Number of student	472	556	558	577	611	651	471	498

Student enrollment fell in 1999, when the district redrew the borders of the school's catchment area, thus alleviating the severe overcrowding. A new wing of classrooms was added to the school for the 1998/99 school year, and all the temporaries were removed by the beginning of the 2000/01 school year.

School C is a split-level brick building with two wings sitting on a small knoll surrounded by a playground, a basketball court, a lawn, and a parking lot. Shrubbery and trees around the facility create a zone of privacy and an impression of a calm and pleasant immediate neighborhood. A short, tree-lined street leads to the school. The school is wedged between a high rise apartment building and a run down shopping area. And yet, the immediate school community is not as calm as it might appear. A few hundred yards down the hill from the school, there is an all- night convenience store located along the major traffic route, which is lined with other businesses, including fast food restaurants and shopping malls. Although there is some community involvement in the school, teachers reported that some local businesses were not even aware of the school's existence. The interviewed teachers characterized the immediate neighborhood as pleasant during the day, but problematic during the night. The area has been experiencing poverty and a lot of violence. For example, the school's temporary classrooms, located behind the school, were broken into and vandalized several times. In interviews teachers mentioned a few incidents of violence that affected the school during the day, e.g., a shooting victim tried to find shelter in the school.

The school's central point is the entrance hall, which leads to the school office, to a multipurpose room serving as the school's gym, cafeteria and assembly place, and to corridors and a stairway leading to the classrooms. The entrance hall is large and dull with its pale green tile walls that are sparsely decorated. A few recognition plaques for the school (all received in the last three years although the school has been in existence since the late sixties), a typed school mission statement, goals, and discipline codes are exhibited on the walls. Nothing is hung at the eye level of students. Dry professional and bureaucratic language of displayed texts makes readers wonder for whom they are intended.

The school's classrooms, occupied by lower grades (K-3), are located in the two wings on the ground floor, grades 4 and 5 are housed in the upper-level classrooms. The long corridors are decorated with a variety of students' work, illustrative of themes dealt with in the classrooms. Well-lit and spacious, classrooms are furnished with small desks and chairs, bookshelves with classroom libraries and teaching material, and equipment (TV, overhead projectors and a few computer screens). Teachers personalized the walls of their classroom with a variety of pictorial and written material and students' work. MSPAP words and learning objectives are displayed in every classroom. The school also has a library-media center, a science lab, a number of small working offices for specialists and support personnel, and a reading room.

Instruction takes place in self-contained setting for grades 1-4, while fifth grade instruction has been departmentalized since 1998/99. In the fifth grade, every teacher teaches reading and language arts in his/her home in addition to the subject (i.e. math, social studies and science) in which he/she specializes. For the 1998/99 school year, a new master schedule was introduced. Reading, language arts, and math are taught every day in uninterrupted blocks in the morning. A reading and language arts block lasts 120 minutes in grades 1-3; and 90 minutes in grades 4-5; a math block lasts 60 minutes for all grades. In addition to core subjects, students also take physical education and music classes, alternating two or three times a week. Classes last twenty minutes for grades 1-3 and thirty minutes for grades 4-5. There is no regular art education, although an art teacher visits the school on a part-time basis. According to teachers, they prepare suggestions for relevant topics in which they would like to be assisted by the art teacher who then has a lesson a few times per a year in each class.

The school staff consists of a principal and a vice-principal, classroom teachers, resource teachers, and specialists. The number of regular classroom teachers and specialists has varied from year to year, and depends on school enrollment. In 1997/98 there were 30 regular classroom teachers and 18 specialists/resource teachers; in 1998/99 there were 25 teachers and 17 specialists/resource teachers; and in 1999/2000 there were 24 and 21 respectively. The specialists and resource staff consisted of Reading Recovery teachers, a special education teacher, a mentor teacher, a speech specialist, computer, math, science, reading and speech resource teachers, a music teacher, a PE teacher, a test-coordinator, a counselor, a social worker, and a librarian/media specialist. With regard to the professional attainment of staff, the majority held BAs, a few held MAs, and few were working towards their MA. In 1998/99, there were five teachers holding provisional certification. However, by the 1999/2000 school year, this figure had dropped to just one. School C's teaching staff was overwhelmingly female and African American.

Student Body

The change in the racial structure of School C's surrounding population was reflected in the student body. In the last decade, the school's student population became almost 100 percent African American. Many students live within walking distance from the school. Approximately half of them come from a modest residential complex, consisting of a few large apartment buildings and other rental property, located just behind the school. Although the borders were redrawn in 1998, about 40 percent of the students were still bused in from nearby areas in 1999. The number of students qualifying for reduced or free lunch, a notable characteristic of other reconstitution-eligible schools in the state of Maryland, reached 60 percent in 1995, and fluctuated between 60 and 70 percent from 1996- 2000. The school became 100 percent Title I in 1997. Interviewed teachers and administrators described their students as needy and exposed to poverty and other poverty related problems such as violence, homelessness, drugs, and crime. Many of them lived in single-parent families, mostly run by mothers.

Although teachers reported that students' social and academic skills were not at the level expected for their age or grade level, few students were classified as learning disabled. The school counselor was of the opinion that many students had not been properly diagnosed and, therefore, were not being appropriately assisted with their problems. As many students lived in difficult home environments, teachers talked about a need for social services, emotional and psychological counseling for many of them. Single-parents families and other social problems helped to explain the lack of parental participation in their children's education. The school sought help in its community, and formed productive partnership with a few neighborhood businesses and organizations.

An important characteristic of the student body in the last several years has been high student mobility. Although in decline from its highest level in 1996 (62.2 percent), student mobility remained high in 1999/2000 (48.6 percent). According to teachers, it is a disturbing factor in their daily work.

Table 2 - School C's Educational Load

Years	1996	1997 [2]	1998	1999	2000
% Free/ Reduced Lunch	66.9	65.5	62.8	70.7	65.9
% Special Education	2.9	2.5	3.7	4.9	3.2
% Entrant/ Withdraws	29.0/28.2	28.0/27.4	29.8 / 32.0	25.5/34.0	24.5/3
% Title I	15.6	100.0	100.0	99.4	100.0

Performance History

School C was an under performing school in the county throughout the 1990s. In 1993, when the MSPAP was first administered, satisfactory level scores were obtained by less than 10 percent of the students in most tested areas. Students performing at the excellent level were very few. The school composite index (7.6) was significantly below the county (21.5) and state (31.7) averages. Since then, the percentage of students reaching MSPAP's satisfactory level has improved considerably in every tested area. For example, in the first three-year period following the implementation of the MSPAP test, the school's composite index rose three times (7.6 to 20.0), and the gap between the composite index in the county (29.6) and state (40.7) narrowed. In late fall of 1997, School C was recognized with a special recognition from the state for improvement over its 1996 performance. However, the MSPAP scores plunged in 1997; the MSPAP composite index fell from 20 in 1996 to just 12 in 1997. However, the test scores did not fall below their initial 1993 level. This dramatic change in the MSPAP scores was the reason the state named School C to its reconstitution-eligible list in January 1998.

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[2] The MSPAP test results in 1997 dropped considerably and as a result, the School C Elementary was declared reconstitution eligible in January 1998.

After being placed on the state's reconstitution-eligible list, the school's MSPAP composite index rose from 12 to 27.5 in 2000. Although the difference between School C's composite index and that of the county and the state is still large, and much below the state goal, the gap narrowed considerably (see Table 3).

Table 3 - MSPAP Composite Index Comparison

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
School C	12.0	14.0	21.8	27.5
County	29.2	32.1	31.1	31.0
State[3]	41.8	44.1	43.8	45.3

The first year after the school had been on probation, School C's 1998 MSPAP test scores dipped even further in some areas: for math in both grades, while for reading and science only in the third grade. Spring 1998 was consumed with preparation of the School Improvement Plans and getting ready for the implementation of several changes. As a result, the focus was not on instruction. However, in the next two years (1999, 2000), the MSPAP test scores for each tested grade in every tested area rose significantly. The MSPAP composite for grade 3 rose by 17 percentage points: from 13.1 (1997) to 30.5 (2000). Large gains were observed in every tested area for third graders in this three-year period. In addition, there are more students performing not only at the satisfactory level, but also at the excellent level in almost every tested area. In some tested areas , e.g., for language usage 13.5 percent for the third graders and 14.9 percent of the fifth graders performed at the excellent level. The number of third graders who performed at the satisfactory and excellent levels combined reached more than 50 percent on the language usage test! Large increases in performance at the satisfactory level are also observed in writing (13 percentage points), science, and social studies (18 percentage points). In math, however the percentage of students performing satisfactorily on the MSPAP test fluctuated at very low levels (less than 10%) and then rose dramatically: 24 percentage points in 2000. For the first time, 2.6 percent of third graders also performed at the excellent level.

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[3] The state standard is 80 percent of students should perform at satisfactory, and 25 percent at excellent level.

The MSPAP composite index for grade 5 rose from 10.8 to 24.3 in three years in every tested area. A large and consistent improvement on the MSPAP test scores is evident in reading (20 percentage points) and language usage (17 percentage points). The gain is somewhat smaller in writing (8 percentage points). There was no obvious trend for the math test score, which fluctuated. In the first two years, the number of students performing satisfactorily rose 15 percentage points, but fell again by almost 10 percentage points. However, large gains were evident in social studies and science. In 1997, only slightly more than three percent of the fifth graders performed at the satisfactory level in social studies. However, by 1999, 21.4 percent scored at the satisfactory level. A similar trend was observed for science: the number of students who reached the MSPAP test's satisfactory level rose by over 20 percentage points (from 7.1 percent in 1997 to 28.6 percent in 1999). However, a slight decrease (three percentage points) for both areas was seen in 2000.

Table 4 - Grade 3 MSPAP Test Scores, Satisfactory Level (Excellent Level)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
Mathematics	9.3(0)	6.3(0)	8.9(0)	33.3(2.6)
Reading	18.6(0)	11.3(0)	22.8(0)	27.0(5.4)

Table 5 - Grade 5 MSPAP Test Scores, Satisfactory Level (Excellent Level)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
Mathematics	7.5(0)	10.7(0)	25.0(0)	15.8 (0)
Reading	7.3(0)	9.0(1.1)	27.0 (1.4)	27.7(3.1)

While there was not much change in the socioeconomic status of the student body, School C improved its academic performance considerably since being placed on probation. However, despite these improvements, its academic performance is still far below the state standard.

Discipline and attendance were two other factors weighted in the school's MSPAP performance. While the attendance was not a major problem for School C, discipline was. Every teacher and administrator named discipline as a serious impediment for better academic achievement of the students. The number of suspension rose from two percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 1999, but dropped back to three percent in 2000.

Until 1999, the school attendance rate was above 94 percent; thus, the school met the state attendance standard on a satisfactory level. In 1999, attendance dropped below the satisfactory level (92.7 percent), only to bounce back in 2000. Some teachers reported that attendance was more problematic in higher grades. However, tardiness was a problem throughout the period. In 1997/98, between 35 and 50 students were late for school every day. According to teachers, attendance problems were an expression of students' problematic home environments. Teachers mentioned that busy parents who were not at home when it is time for students to leave for school, and late-night TV watching were possible reasons for students tardiness. The school administration did not address its tardiness problem until 1999/2000, when the social worker and the guidance counselors became involved.

Stability

Although the principal was at the school for more than a decade, the school could hardly be called a stable organization. According to the principal, the school was a stable institution in the first half of the 1990s. In the fall of 1996, 12 teachers, most of them experienced teachers of testing grades, did not return to the school. The reason for this exodus was a rather painful conflict among the teachers regarding the MSPAP testing. There was a rumor that some teachers had helped students with the MSPAP test. Neither the principal nor the interviewed teachers wanted to talk about the conflict, short of a few comments that they were glad that the "troublemakers" had left. Since then, high teacher turnover has been a challenge for the principal, who tried inventive ways to find competent and experienced teachers.

Between 1996 and 1999, approximately one third of School C's teachers and staff left every year. Out of 30 classroom teachers in 1997/98, only eight could still be found in the school at the beginning of the 2000/2001 school year; of those eight, four were kindergarten teachers. The mobility rate was higher for classroom teachers than for specialists. And yet, in the same period, 11 of 19 resource and specialist teachers also left by the summer of 2000. Out of 12 teachers, specialists, and administrators interviewed between May in December 1998, only two specialists could still be found in the school two years later. However, according to the staff members interviewed in the spring of 2000, fewer teachers left the school after the 1999/2000 school year.

Interviewees mentioned several reasons for this high teacher turnover. Higher pay, better career options elsewhere, and poor discipline at the school were most often named. Teachers stressed that their colleagues also left because of additional work and pressure, created with the new policies and programs which had been introduced as a result of the school's reconstitution-eligible status.

Teachers' Explanation of the 1997 Decline and their Reaction to Probationary Status

Explanation of Decline

Regardless of their position and length of tenure at the school, administrators, specialists, and teachers interviewed for this research mentioned very similar reasons for the school's 1997 MSPAP decline. Their explanations could be grouped around three factors: problematic socioeconomic status of the students, unsuitable physical conditions of the school, and factors related to school management (discipline) and teachers' competence.

The administrators and support staff placed much blame for the school's low performance on students' social problems and believed that the school's recon status had little to do with teachers or administrators at the school. Thus, they did not take School C's status as a reconstitution-eligible school personally. As a result, they reported they had no fear of possible consequences either for themselves or for the school.

Above all, the teachers attributed students' poor academic performance to the socioeconomic status of the student body. Some teachers perceived large changes in the student body, which could be partly corroborated with available data. For example, in 1997 the school became 100 percent Title, which was a significant change from the previous year (see Table 2.) Interviewees also reported that there had been less parental involvement in the school and students' work in the last few years due to many single parents households, parents' work schedules, and a general lack of value placed on education which was observed in students' attitudes toward school work and discipline. According to teachers, high student mobility exacerbated the problems in classroom instruction, illustrated by one of the classroom teachers in the following manner:

> I started like between 23 and 25, I only ended up with 11 original kids. Ok, I had lost, I mean, you constantly are losing students, so you're starting over and you're trying to build, and you have to build that relationship with them. You have to, you know, if they came from out of the state, they weren't used to, you know, the kind of structure and the teaching that went into MSPAP. So, that was hard, and then you know, you had discipline problems with some kids. (C-9)

Although, the socioeconomic status of the students is, indeed, an important indicator of students' school performance, the interviewed teachers also discussed at length other reasons for the school's poor academic performance as expressed in its MSPAP test results.

Everyone mentioned the severely overcrowded conditions at the school. Half of the students -- mostly in grades 3-5 -- had instruction in a dozen temporary classrooms located behind the school. A significant amount of instructional time was lost due to students having to travel to various activities in the main building, i.e. the library, music classes, lunch brakes, and bathrooms. To make problems worse, several temporaries had been broken into and ransacked, their equipment stolen and teaching material destroyed. The ongoing construction of a new wing created additional disturbances and noise in the school. In addition, the school lacked teaching materials and was poorly equipped with outdated technology, often in non-working condition. Interviewees reported that classes were large, and teaching materials and textbooks were not available for every student.

In addition to the school's situation with overcrowding, lower grade teachers, first grade in particular, complained that they had too many students in class. They also lacked assistance with poorly socialized students at very different developmental levels and cognitive skills. A first grade teacher with two years of teaching experience, said: "You know, I am here sitting with 28 first graders with no aide. And the parents don't come in to help and if the parents do come in to help they are not very useful, not because it is their fault but they do not know what to do...."(C-11). Among teachers' suggestions with regard to what they needed to improve student's performance, more people in the classroom and more parental support were most frequently cited.

A majority of those interviewed mentioned a large and somewhat mysterious exodus of teachers in 1996. Twelve of 28 teachers, most of them experienced, did not return in the fall of 1996/97. That year, all the third grade classes had new teachers who lacked teaching experience in public schools. Two of these new grade teachers left by Christmas and the vacant teaching positions were filled with substitutes for the remainder of the year. Thus, one third grade class had three different teachers and the other class had two. Another third grade class was relocated three times during the school year, and, as a result, lost a considerable amount of instructional time. Two other newly hired teachers left during that school year. Thus, the testing grades experienced a fair amount of turmoil, which according to teachers was reflected in the school's test scores.

Nevertheless, some specialists and experienced teachers did point out that teacher's lack of competence due to inexperience or unfamiliarity with the new curriculum played a part in the poor academic performance of the students. A math specialist, who had been a teacher at the school before she became a math specialist in 1997/1998, interpreted the new school status as a warning that "we did not succeed in giving the students what they needed" (C-08). According to those new teachers interviewed, they had not taught the content and skills required on the MSPAP simply because they had not been aware of what was being tested. It was alluded that the MSPAP was considered a taboo topic at the school. A veteran teacher with 30 years in education and more than fifteen at the school said:

> Until the school was named RECON eligible, there wasn't any systematic effort to train teachers for teaching new methodology required for successful performance on the MSPAP, such as cooperative learning, problem solving and others. Curriculums were also not aligned with the MSPAP. (C-R4)

Not only did the teachers have to deal with teaching new curricula, they also had difficulties managing classrooms and found discipline problems to be overwhelming. Discipline was mentioned by every teacher or administrator interviewed as the most serious obstacle in teaching. All but one survey respondent placed discipline as the number one challenge for the school if its academic performance was to be improved. The classroom management was particularly difficult for those few new teachers without experience in public schools. Although teachers mostly blamed unruly and bad mannered students for discipline problems, they expressed a need to learn more about classroom management.

Initial Reaction

School C Elementary School was identified a reconstitution-eligible school in January 1998. Interviewed teachers and administration expressed mixed feelings about the announcement. Everybody appreciated receiving funds that alleviated the overcrowding and provided additional resources (both human and technical) for instruction. However, not everyone was thrilled by the pressure that was created by the MSPAP testing and other changes which effected their daily work routine, such as learning new curricula and teaching strategies, preparation of lesson plans, a new emphasis on pacing, additional paperwork, and constant visitors.

With the exception of the principal, none of the interviewed teachers or staff members were surprised when the school was identified as reconstitution-eligible. They had seen the students struggle with the MSPAP tests in 1997 and low test scores were expected. However, the principal said that he did not expect the news and took it personally. In the interview, he stressed that he had received mixed messages about the school from the Department of Education in a short period of time. In a span of less than two months, the school received a School Performance Recognition for its 1996 performance improvement and then was placed on the reconstitution-eligible list for its subsequent 1997 decline. After his initial strong feelings of disappointment, rejection, and failure, the principal came to terms with the school's new label. Having felt that he had done everything in his power to run the school successfully, he began looking at the new status of the school as something positive and almost as a necessary asset in overcoming the school's acknowledged problems. He became determined that the school performance, measured by the MSPAP, would improve under his leadership. It also appeared it was a matter of pride for the principal to stay at the school and to improve the school's performance.

Although teachers and support staff were not surprised about the news, they didn't feel good about it either. Predominately mixed feelings were expressed about the new status, but veterans at the school were more critical toward the label. Here is the opinion of a veteran media specialist who has been at the school since its opening in the late 1960s:

> Well, it's a mixed feeling. I know that, on one hand, we do need help. On the other hand, I know that we do have positive things that are happening with the students and with the teachers. So, it's kind of a mixed feeling. I do think that we do need help in

> certain areas, and we have a lot of new staff members, and the turnover rate is very high, the student transient rate is very high . . . I think we do have a lot of positive things going on. We have a lot of dedicated teachers. We have a lot of students who are very diligent workers. So, like I said it's a mixed feeling.(04)

Most interviewees saw validity in the school's new status and welcomed outside attention to and help for the school, particularly that in the form of additional resources. At the same time, they were very critical about the way the news was communicated to them and to the world. Before the school was officially announced as reconstitution-eligible, rumors had been circulating in the school. The news was brought to them at the faculty meeting by the wounded principal, who blamed the teachers in part for the low-test scores. One third grade teacher in her second year at the school explained:

> Well, actually I had very little reaction to it. I saw it as valid . . . It's hard to put the reconstitution-eligible label on it. If it was labeled in a different way, as more a school that needs additional help in some way or the other, it would be easier to identify with that . . . It has this terrible name and our administration put it to us really upset that they had this decline in scores so it was very punitive and it was put to us in a punitive way. We were actually threatened with our jobs because we're not doing the right thing, and da, da da. And they said, well they're going to come and provide us support. Well, that would have been a better way to start... (C-5)

The interviewed classroom teachers, generally new to the school, were more ambiguous. Some newcomers were unsure of what the label meant for them and for the school. Initially, a few teachers wondered: "What's going to happen to me? Am I going to lose my job?" (C-3). "Will the school be closed down?" (C-11). They also questioned the role they might have had in the low school performance and felt shame "My God, they will think that it's my fault!" (C-9). But at the same time, they immediately explained their feelings away. First, new teachers said that they had been at the school only for a year or two, and that they were not at the school when the

MSPAP took place in May 1997. A second year teacher said:

> To some degree it was tough because we were getting blamed for the students not learning. I'm like, well, I wasn't here for that but then it was also confusing because you know, what did that mean? They had brochures and things but weren't sure about what was going to happen to us. (C-13)

They did not feel that they were part of the problem, and some teachers stressed that the teachers in testing grades (third and fifth grade) were more responsible for the MSPAP results. They were sure that they had worked very hard and did their best given the student population, working conditions, and resources available at the school. This view is supported by the majority of survey respondents (11 of 14) who agreed that they had been working to the best of their abilities despite low test scores.

Several interviewees also questioned the fairness of solely evaluating the school on the basis of its MSPAP scores without taking other mitigating factors into consideration. In addition, the usage of the term "reconstitution" for low performing schools with a heavy educational load was questioned by some teachers and support staff who saw this label as negative, punitive, and not motivating. They wondered why the state did not select more inspiring terms, such as revitalization which could have a more positive and less punitive tone (C-2). Teachers also mentioned that the media attention caused by the public announcement of their school as reconstitution-eligible was disturbing and unwelcome. According to one interviewee, it felt like a public lynching. On the other hand, some teachers commented that the labeling of the school had nothing to do with the real events that followed. "This action is as a synonym for help and was completely misnamed," commented one teacher (C-3).

Parents were informed about the reconstitution-eligible status of the school at a meeting the day before the public announcement. The principal and teachers reported that the meeting was poorly attended. Only about 30 parents came. They knew that the school had been overcrowded for years were very angry about the label and saw the state as the culprit for the present situation. The next day, the news about the school was reported in the media. Very few parents called the school and requested more information or explanation about the new status of the school. There was also very little reaction by parents to an extensive write-up about the school in the main daily newspaper in the metropolitan area. The principal was of the opinion that the parents had neither the interest to get involved, nor the background to understand the importance of the MSPAP for the school.

It is obvious that external attention to the school was welcomed. What seemed to be most troubling for the School C staff, however, was the way the news was communicated to them, particularly because they felt the school's problems were associated more with external problems than with their own abilities as educators. They felt they were not treated as professionals. Although everyone wanted the school to succeed, most interviewees were not sure if the school could improve to the level sought by the state. Half of the survey respondents were sure that the school would improve while the other half did not know and only one respondent was very doubtful. In the interviews, administrators and specialists were more optimistic with regard to the possibility of school improvement than teachers who were unsure as to whether they could overcome daily problems in classrooms.

Leadership

When the school was identified as reconstitution-eligible, Mr. B, the principal, close to retirement, had been at the school for nine years. Before coming to School C, Mr. B had been a vice-principal for 16 years in the same county, and was considered a seasoned veteran with 25 years of experience in school administration. Holding an MA in music education, Mr. B started his career in education as a band teacher, but soon became an administrator who pursued his studies in a Ph.D. program on educational leadership at the local university. The principal, an African-American, had close connections with the wider community, and under his leadership, the school's MSPAP performance had improved from 1993 to 1996. He built a strong faculty, but in 1996 many teachers left the school due to an internal conflict related to the MSPAP testing. Disappointed, he commented: "I gave them opportunity for staff development. I sent them places to grow. And when they get better opportunities, they leave . . . And I lost them all . . . I had to start all over from scratch with a bunch of new people and it did not work" (C-1).

After this large exodus of teachers in the summer of 1996, the principal tried very hard to build a new faculty and administrative team. That proved to be a difficult task as teacher turnover remained high. However, he creatively pursued hiring specialists and new teachers. He looked for them in the neighboring private schools and went to a job fair in Florida. For the 1996/97 school year, he hired 13 new teachers, half of them were first year teachers; the other half were either from private schools, or older teachers who had returned to the teaching profession after many years working elsewhere. The success built over more than three years evaporated as the new and inexperienced teachers entered the school. Working in overcrowded classrooms, new teachers struggled with teaching curriculum, classroom management, poor discipline, and allegedly uncooperative parents.

The 1997 MSPAP test scores dropped and the school was put on probation in January 1998. In schools similar to School C the county would have replaced the principal. However, displaying strong commitment to the school, he said he felt he had to stay and prove that improvement for the school was possible with strong support from the county and the state. The county's educational authorities decided not to replace the principal and offered him their full support with regards to improving the school's performance. The school got whatever it had been asking for.

The principal was described as a likable, well-connected person in the community who was easy to talk to. The staff saw him as a kind and caring person who was genuinely concerned for the well being of students and teachers. Naturally, this view was particularly strong among the faculty who had survived the reconstitution period (1997/98 to 1999/2000). However, most interviewed faculty members, regardless of their roles, saw the principal as a transmitter of the district's and state's policies with which they had to comply. This perception of the principal was conformed by the survey, where two thirds of respondents agreed with the statement "The principal tells us what the district and the state expect of us, and we comply."

The principal felt that raising the MSPAP test scores and building a better image of the school was the most important goal, which he pursued with several strategies. Besides being aggressive in hiring new people, he delegated instructional leadership to the vice-principal and a team of specialists. Above all, he depended heavily on the reading specialist whom he had hired as a reading teacher in 1997. In the winter of 1998, the principal involved her in the writing of the School Improvement Plan and, although there were other specialists and teachers engaged in the process, the reading specialist was the engine behind the SIP. She called herself a primary typist who kept writing and rewriting the SIP before being approved in the late spring of 1998.

The interviewed teachers and staff regarded the principal neither as a disciplinarian nor as an efficient organizer. While the first characteristic was mentioned only by few, the second one was expressed by most interviewees and emphasized particularly by the new teachers. New, inexperienced teachers saw the principal as detached and not particularly helpful. They stated that the principal built a layer of non-classroom people with whom he worked and tried to influence teachers through them. For example, they complained that they did not like him observing their classes without giving them any feedback. They also felt that the principal did not listen to them and that their suggestions for improving instruction were disregarded.

School C was suffering from a lack of organization, a job which is the principal's prerogative. The organization of the school and good communication is important for everybody, but crucial for novices. That is even more true in schools with a difficult work environment and few veteran teachers to lean on for immediate advice, both conditions valid for School C. Novice teachers felt that information was not shared on time, and not on all levels. As a result, they were not well informed about what was going on in the school. Here are a few teachers' statements, illustrating the lack of organization in the school. One first grade teacher with four years of experience, but new to the school commented:

> There are so many papers out there, and there are so many things that I really don't know what I am supposed to do with it . . . Sometimes it is very overwhelming . . . I think we need to become more organized. (C-3)

A first grade teacher in her second year at the school reported:

> The biggest, biggest problem in the school is communication. And I don't know why. It never trickles down. I mean a lot of what we get is from "Did you hear?" ... Oh, we're having harvest day on Friday three weeks ago. Make sure we have something prepared. This is what we want. (C-11)

A fifth grade teacher also in her second year at the school observed:

> A lot of these meetings you can only send two or three people to. So, people go and then you never know what went on. And if it's supposed to help everyone who is MSPAP, like they had an MSPAP meeting and two people went from fifth grade. Well, that's fine, but I didn't hear anything about it when they came back . . . unless you're the person picked, and you plan on sharing with someone, you don't know what's going on. And being involved, I try to go to a lot of things, so I know that I can bring back to my team, but it's difficult, because then I'm pulled out a lot of classroom and I don't like that, because then the kids aren't learning anything. So, you lose either way. (C-7)

However, the reading specialist described the principal as a good listener and a team player who was able to delegate. She was aware that new teachers did not share her view, saying:

> I make it my business to know. I don't wait. I don't know if they take the initiative sometimes. I think they wait for it to come to them instead of saying, "All right, I know that I need to get this stuff done. I know what's coming up and I'm going to track someone down until I get my answers." And that's what I push and shove. I really am. (C-8)

Although the principal hired several specialists who took over instruction at School C, he did not organize them well within the school community. As a result, the interviewed teachers expressed that they did not have much contact or help from the resource teachers and specialists in the classroom. Although the teachers, particularly the new ones, highly valued the reading specialist and her help, there seemed to be a communication gap between specialists and the teachers. For example, the math specialist, formerly a math teacher at the school, said that teachers did not want to get involved in new school programs, waited for directions, and did not want to make decisions on their own, even in everyday, common sense things. Every single teacher interviewed and even one specialist believed that the newly hired specialists did not have much of an impact on teachers' classroom instruction. A fifth grade teacher described a situation with the specialists as an organizational problem:

> I think that there are some people in the building this year [1998/99], who are in those specialist positions that they feel they have more power than they are supposed to do. I think that causes a problem because some people that are supposed to be pulling students, you never see them. If that's what your job is, and you have been supposed to be helping, yes, I know you have a title but besides that you're supposed to be picking up so many students every day that are low readers . . . I can't go and say "Look you are not doing your job. That's not my place. I know the reading specialist is really pushing the reading program. But she can only do so much . . . You know, the principal needs to make sure that he is overseeing everything, so that people know what their place is . . . " (C-9)

The interviewees were divided on how much they participated in the decision making process. While the specialists and experienced teachers reported that they were engaged in the decision making process, the newer teachers felt they were excluded. It looks as if decision making was not a broad-based process, but rather a top down affair led and controlled by the principal despite the cooperation of the specialists. Again, the responses from the survey are in line with interviewee reports. Only four survey respondents agreed with the statement that they had been consulted about decisions in the school which affected them, and only two agreed with the statement that the faculty had discussed major decisions in the school. Furthermore, all but one respondents agreed with the statement that "the same small group of people sits on most of the active committees, and is involved in most new projects and programs here."

All interviewees were of the opinion that the principal was held accountable for the situation in the school by the county and the state, and therefore everybody, including his closest colleagues, reported that all final decisions in the school were always made by him. He wanted to appear to be in charge and in control of the situation at the school. Although not appreciated by all the faculty members, some explained his controlling streak as a survival skill and a necessity in the present accountability system. However, his leadership style, poor organizational skills, and controlling behavior probably contributed to high teacher turnover in the years after 1996. And yet, despite these difficulties, the school has improved physically and academic performance has been on the rise.

Collegiality

Despite high teacher turnover, all interviewees reported that they got along with their colleagues and saw the administration as supportive, if not always helpful in dealing with classroom problems. The survey respondents also confirm this sentiment. Only one respondent felt he/she could not count on his/her colleagues when being down about the school. The interviewed teachers in their first or second year at the school were overwhelmed by teaching and classroom management but they felt they had some support in coping with the problems in the classroom. This is an account of a second year kindergarten teacher at the school:

> Well, it's informal. I mean we're just blowing off steam. But all the first grade teachers were new teachers last year with us, so we kind of bonded just because of that, so I do have contact with them. Because you had to, last year the biggest key to surviving was finding a shoulder to cry on. And we just took turns every day, someone else was crying and you had to cheer them up and then it was your turn. I mean it was so, I mean it was rough last year. (C-13)

According to administrators and specialists, professional cooperation among teachers improved since the school was placed the reconstitution-eligible list. With establishing the master schedule in 1998/99, the administration created a block of time available for teachers to meet and plan their work at the grade level. Grade teams meet regularly, and specialists and other resource people often attend planning sessions. Although teachers stated that these planning times were useful as a content preparation for classes, they indicated that with the reconstitution status looming over their heads, they did not have as much time to offer informal collegial help to each other as they had before. They became too busy with their own classrooms. One of the teachers in her second year at the school said:

> I got a lot of help last year from everybody so I didn't feel any barriers. Now, this year I feel some barriers . . . people are focusing more on their own room. I can't focus on third grade's problem because I have a big, huge problem in first grade. Last year, I think, we more or less tried to focus all together, at least to support each other because we had more time. We didn't feel so pressured. Now, there are more closed doors, even though he [the principal] fights against that, but there is more of that. There is more of the attitude 'I can't help you right now because I'm busy.' (C-11)

Teachers' cooperation was given more attention with providing an opportunity for grade level teachers to meet, but it seemed that grade team planning meetings, although helpful, did not foster collegiality in a manner that satisfied the needs of new teachers. Furthermore, teachers expressed that these planning sessions were really not the place where they could discuss their real problems, in part because specialists and administrators were in attendance. One teacher said:

> If something did not work for you, there is no forum to discuss it freely and openly. We just do it the way it is prescribed at least when we are observed. The visitors are

> very critical. You do not want to stand out and being reported as the one who does not follow what is required. (C-15)

Interviews with the new teachers indicate that novices did not have enough systematic and organized help in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

Strategies

After School C was identified as a reconstitution-eligible school in January 1998, it received attention and help from district educational authorities. The principal responded to outside demands for school performance improvement and, as a result, several strategies were implemented simultaneously at the school.

Immediately after being declared reconstitution-eligible, the principal worked with a school-based School Program Management Team to develop the School Improvement Plan, which focused on reading and math. Moreover, the SIP also dealt with the school climate (discipline and attendance) and with teacher training. As is evident from interviews, formulating the SIP was not a broad, collaborative process, but rather the job of a small group. Just a few of those interviewed mentioned their participation in the SIP writing process. However, the entire faculty was informed about the document, and most teachers commented that they had seen and read the document -- at least those sections that pertained to their work. Several teachers pointed out that the SIP's planned percentages for improving performance in the individual testing areas were arbitrary and useless. Although the majority of interviewees thought that the SIP included all the important elements for the improvement of the school performance, the interviewed teachers did not see the SIP as a particularly useful guide for their work. This sentiment is illustrated in the following statements:

> While looking good on the paper, it has little effect on my work in the classroom. (C-3)
>
> Well I think it is all in there. It is just a matter putting it into effect . . . The problem is: it really looks nice on paper but then with everybody pulled in all these different directions, it does not happen. (C-11)

Observations that the SIP did not serve as a particularly useful guide for teachers' activities were corroborated by the survey respondents who agreed that the SIP was an element of the school accountability system, but at the same time, they thought that it had little effect on school improvement. However, the specialists and administrators reported that they were using the SIP regularly in their work.

The 1998/99 school year at School C under visibly different circumstances. For example, the principle noted that he was finally able to hire custodians to keep the school clean on a regular basis. According to all interviewees as well as the majority of survey respondents, new funds, which became available as soon as the school had been identified as reconstitution-eligible, had a substantial impact on the school. In 1998/1999, the school received $182,000 in recon funds, $233,000 in Title I funds, and a Poverty Assistance grant totaling $81,000.[4] However, the administrators and the teachers complained that the school's recon funds were significantly cut back the next year to just $120,000.

Most funds were spent for hiring additional teachers/specialists, technology, textbooks, and teaching materials. The interviewees reported that substantial resources and time were spent on teacher training, either in the school with the school specialists or with outside professionals such as publishing consultants and county trainers. According to reports, teacher training was an ongoing project at School C. Although it was considered to be very much needed and generally useful, the new training required a lot of the teacher's time. In addition, teachers reported that some of their older colleagues left the school so that they would not have to be saddled with the responsibility of learning new instructional programs.

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[4] The data are taken from the 1998/1999 school improvement plan.

A Smaller and Quieter School

The completion of a new wing and the redrawing of district boundaries helped to alleviate School C's serious overcrowding problem. The last vestiges of School C's overcrowding were eliminated with the removal of the school's many temporary classrooms before the start of the 2000/01 school year. According to some interviewed teachers, many discipline problems also did not return to the school. A zero tolerance policy for misbehaving students was instituted and the number of suspensions increased in 1998/99. While some teachers liked to send misbehaving students to the transitional learning center (TLC), others saw this policy as a double-edged sword for the improvement of the school performance. One of the fifth grade teacher explained: "When they're not here, they are not learning, so that's going to hurt our scores. When they are here, they're disrupting, so you're losing either way that you look at it." (07) In 1998/99, the teacher, who was responsible for the TLC, was sick, and thus, the center often closed. The next school year, the TLC was not funded, and was permanently closed. Instead, professional development for teachers on cooperative discipline was organized in the school during the 1999/2000 school year by a county professional. Its goal was to develop a more positive environment and make students responsible for their own behavior. Several teachers praised this training as extremely useful for classroom management. The only reservation they had about it was that they wished it had been offered at the beginning of the school year. Teachers also reported that the administration was more supportive of their efforts to enforce the school discipline code. At teachers' request, the principal and the vice-principal visited individual classes and talked about discipline to students both as a group and on an individual basis. There was a feeling among teachers and staff members that they helped each other to enforce the school discipline code. If they saw students in the halls who did not follow the discipline rules, they took time to remind students to walk in the third square, not run, or be quite, or pick up trash in the halls. The number of suspension decreased from 17 percent in 1999 to 3 percent in 2000.

Moreover, the school administration also addressed the problem of chronically tardy students in the 1999/2000 school year. The social worker and guidance counselors began to contact parents of these students and worked with them to promote on-time attendance.

After the school was named reconstitution-eligible, the school enrolment declined by about 25 percent (see Table 1), new space was added, and a few teachers and specialists reported that their classes became smaller. Although the teacher-student ratio in the school was reported to be 1:24 in 1999/2000, the lower grade teachers spoken to by the research team reported that they had just 20 students in their classrooms. A spirit assembly was established where the students with perfect attendance were recognized. Almost every teacher appreciated new textbooks for the students and other teaching materials, which became available in the classrooms. The teachers stressed that it made a difference in their work. However, some teachers mentioned that direct help with teaching (e.g., a half day teaching aide) would probably been more beneficial for students' academic success than the specialists with whom they had little contacts.

According to some teachers and administrators, the overall school climate improved over the last two school years (1998/99 and 1999/2000), and the school definitely became a quieter, better equipped and more pleasant place to work. While an enlarged school space, better equipped with teaching material and technology, smaller number of students in the school and in classes, and better discipline were crucial steps, they were not sufficient for improving the school performance.

Changes in School C's Instruction

Major strategies aimed at the curricula, instruction and its organization, and assessment were handed down to the school administration and teachers from the district office. The countywide curricula with accompany textbooks and teaching materials, supposedly aligned with the MSPAP, were adopted in the school. The new reading program "Invitation to Literacy" was implemented in 1998/99, while the new mathematics program (Scott Foreman) was brought to the school in 1999/2000. The school's curricula were aligned with the county's prescribed curriculum framework and were supposed to be followed in every classroom. The school also adopted Strategic Teaching and Reading Project Strategies (STRP) as a comprehensive school reform model, which supported the county's goal to focus on reading and writing across all content areas. All School C teachers attended STRP workshops, organized by the county. Interviewed teachers were generally satisfied with their training and generally praised it.

However, they did express some objections. Here is one experienced teacher's account of STRP training:

> I was glad that I had this training. It was very good. It made a lot of sense. Before, material was given to us and we were told "do it". It is like with students. You give them a workbook and they would not do the work properly, but when you do it with them, explain and motivate them, then you see a difference. We had a quality time at these workshops. We were treated like professionals and were able to experience STRP. I follow the prescribed curriculum, and I now feel more confident when all these schools, county and state observers descend onto my classroom. However, there were a lot of things we, at least, I knew. I have been teaching for 30 years. But now I know what's required. We heard a lot of good common sense things a teacher does anyway in the class if conditions allow. I wish I had teaching aid, at least half of the day, so we could do more of those things we heard about. I often wonder if all these researchers and specialists have been teaching and doing things in real classrooms. Believe me, it's tough in the classroom with needy, twenty plus children. (C-14)

The school took teacher training for the new programs very seriously. As a result, it received a special acknowledgment for school-wide participation in teacher training in 1998/99.

Reading and Writing: the Focus of Instruction

The school administration, specialists, and teachers believed that student performance on the MSPAP tests depended heavily on students language skills, particularly reading. Therefore, the entire school focused on reading and writing instruction. In 1998/99, the new countywide reading series "Invitation to Literacy" was introduced to the school. Although all teachers attended a short workshop offered by the publisher, it was the reading specialist who implemented the program at the school. She prepared "Invitation to Literacy" for implementation in combination with other programs (i.e. Soar to Success) for different grades and even individual teachers.

An able and energetic teacher, promoted to a reading specialist, she was familiar with the ideas behind the MSPAP, she could analyze the MSPAP test scores and identify problems. She was though to be an excellent reading teacher who was able to work closely with other teachers. She not only prepared the school implementation program, but also helped with teacher training and class preparation. She herself prepared concrete lesson plans for every grade and class and she modeled a lesson in class for every teacher. She described her work in the following way:

> I know what's going to be tested. I give them a Monday through Friday plan, this is our writing prompt, that I created for them too. I give them a five-day lesson plan and I just put, every day I give them a journal and a warm up so that it's really focused and I just broke it in. "This is the literature that you cover today. This is your spelling, your grammar, your writing. How you choose to present it is your choice completely. If you want to do small group, whole group, however, if you want to put a cute little twist on it, that's your choice. The whole thing is just make sure by the end of the week you've covered these five pages." (C-8)

She tested all the students in the school, analyzed the results, identified students who needed special assistance, helped with organizing students groups within each class, and also taught third grade reading groups. Several interviewees, particularly the new teachers, praised her help. A new first grade teachers reported that she had received two days of in-service training on the new reading series from the county which wasn't enough for her. She noted: "If it was not for our reading specialist, she is fabulous. She writes our plans . . . daily. I follow them to a T, try to follow them . . . There is a lot in them . . . I think I am the only one that follows them but I need it the most because I am the first year . . . " (C-11)

Despite the hard work and enthusiasm of the reading specialist, there were some problems with the implementation of the new reading program. The specialists were assigned to each grade to pull out identified students with reading problems and work with them in small groups on regular basis. According to the reading specialist, this plan was not working out as planned. She explained:

> It is gone really well K through 3. It's not going well 4-5, and that's you know hit or miss as to why. We've assigned one specialist per grade just to deal with reading groups. We have been struggling to find someone for the fourth grade . . . and the MSPAP coordinator is supposed to take the fifth grade . . . It's not happening. (C-8)

The first step -- testing and identifying weak students -- took place, while the second step -- providing help -- was not always carried through. Statements with teachers from the upper grades were in line with the reading specialist's observation. They reported that they had not had much contact with specialists and resource teachers. When asked how specialists helped them with teaching and managing a class, they expressed direct and indirect criticism about the involvement of some specialists in instruction. According to them, help was rather sporadic. Here are two teachers' statements corroborating the reading specialist observation. A fourth grade teacher notes:

> Nobody is pulling weak students out of my classroom, there is no individual help for those few that would really need it in my math group. My reading group is large, over 20 students and only a few times I had the reading specialist taking a small group out. We get help with testing, but not with instruction. No specialists are coming to fourth and fifth grade on a regular basis. (C-15)

A fifth grade teacher:

> I think there's some people in the building this year that are in those specialist positions that feel that they have more power than they're supposed to. I think that causes a problem because some people that are supposed to be pulling students, you never see them. If that's what your job is, and you're supposed to be helping, yes I know you have a title... besides that title, you're supposed to be picking up so many students every day that are low readers, because you want them to make this grade level reading. (C-7)

It looked that the reading program in the lower grades was much more consistent and well supported by other compensatory services in the school (i.e. Title I). Classroom teachers in the lower grades classed noted that reading recovery teachers made a large difference in the reading of the students who were behind by regularly pulling them out of the classes and working with them individually. A second grade teacher said: "In lower grades, we have these wonderful recovery reading teams. They pull individual students out and make my work much easier. But not much help from anybody else in the class. What we need is a teaching aide at least half of the day" (C-17).

However, not every teacher fully subscribed to the mandated county reading curriculum instituted by the reading specialist. A fifth grade teacher, considered successful, described the changes in the program, saying:

> Last year [1997/98] we really focused on every month you should have so many open-ended questions. But this year [1998/99], the School Improvement Plan is more focusing on the new reading program that we have. Invitations to Literacy. And basically, everything is given to you. ... by the specialist. Right, by the specialist, but also by the company, everything... She's getting everything from the company, so we have our workbooks and we have the additional novels that go along with the selections that we're reading. So, everything is tied in together. So, what happens is now you have all your theme tests. So, you have all your open-ended questions in there. You have your writing prompts that go directly with what you're reading. (C-7)

This fifth grade teacher, noted that her teaching had changed with the new reading program. Instead of role playing in reading, projects, story telling, recreating history, etc. she tried to follow the prescribed "diet" to get good result on the MSPAP test. When the research team wanted to have a follow up interview with her a year later, they were informed that she had left the school. One of the teachers confided to us that her creative teaching style was not welcomed in the school any longer.

Despite the reading program's implementation problems, the school's administration, specialists, and teachers believed that it, along with the reading specialist and the school's emphasis on teacher training, made a difference with regard to the school's performance. They believed that these strategies were probably one of the main reasons for the school's increased MSPAP scores.

The MSPAP - Attitudes and Strategies

While students' progress and knowledge were assessed by various methods, the MSPAP tests were surely the most important. As they measured the school's success, interviewees reported that the MSPAP test scores were the main focus of the entire life and work of the school. Comments like "Everything in the school is done with the MSPAP in mind" or "The MSPAP rules School C" were heard in interviews and informal conversation at the school. However, interviewed teachers tended to place less importance on the MSPAP test than did specialists and administrators.

While the majority of survey respondents were of the opinion that the accountability goals gave the school direction for its work (11 of 14), just two respondents thought the accountability system in Maryland should remain as it is. They also agreed that the quality of the school should not be based on quantitative test scores, but rather on the holistic evaluation of inspectors who knew the school well (11 out of 14 respondents). In the interviews, the interviewees did not question the general concept of accountability. They did, however, question some elements of the

Maryland accountability system, particularly the MSPAP tests. Several of them also questioned the fairness of evaluating the school solely on the basis of MSPAP without taking other contributing factors, crucial to school performance, into account. In addition, they were of the opinion that the MSPAP test was biased, and supported this supposition with various reasons. According to some teachers, the MSPAP tests were built on the wrong assumption that every student was at the same developmental or educational level. At the elementary level, large differences among students in maturation exist and often they have little to do with students' actual cognitive abilities.

Teachers lamented about the manner in which the MSPAP test was conducted. They reported that two weeks of timed testing tired students and frustrated teachers, as they could not use this time productively. However, interviewees reported that teachers and students were becoming used to the test and the stress it placed on them. In some teachers' view, the MSPAP testing in May was disturbing for non-testing grade students and teachers since the entire school had to accommodate the MSPAP testing grades.

Despite their negative attitudes and laments about the MSPAP test, teachers also recognized some positive aspects to it as well. For example, the approved of a test that sought to measure high order thinking skills, such as problem solving and cooperation among the students in learning process. In general, the teachers did not oppose testing as an educational tool to help them review what they had done, identify gaps in students' knowledge were, and to help them redirect instruction. Nevertheless, some teachers thought that there was just too much testing without a concern for "real" students knowledge. They were of the opinion that there was too much testing for the wrong reasons and that instruction was too driven by testing. Regarding this fact, one reading teacher commented: "We are consumed with testing - milestone testing, MSPAP practice, CBS . . . And we do focus on the testing grades. Sometimes, it feels that we hardly have time to do anything else, for example, teach . . . "(C-19).

The teachers were ambivalent towards the MSPAP tests. Although their attitudes were quite negative toward the tests, the teachers considered them important because they were a measurement of student performance. Therefore, there was no surprise that instruction was driven by the MSPAP tests in two ways: first, the school organized specific activities which were aimed at developing awareness of the MSPAP tests and better test taking skills among the students; and second, the curriculum was aligned to the contents, supposedly measured by the tests.

The newly hired MSPAP coordinator reported that her work focused on test preparation and test readiness. Every week, there were MSPAP practices - working in groups, getting familiar with the test format, etc. In May, MSPAP tests for third and fifth graders took place over two weeks, and the entire school had to adjust its activities accordingly. In her view, all of her work was connected with the MSPAP tests, although she stressed that she was involved in preparing students for the MSPAP test as well as helping teachers to follow the prescribed curriculum in testing grades. She said: "We didn't teach the exact test but taught we taught to the test" (C-P4). In addition to helping conduct/organize weekly performance tasks, the MSPAP coordinator also made sure that every teacher displayed MSPAP words and lesson objectives somewhere in his/her classroom. She was also responsible for carrying out the two weeks of MSPAP testing.

To monitor student progress and guide instruction during the school year, students in grades 2-5 were tested three times a year using milestone exams and county benchmarks, which are highly related to the MSPAP tests. Their results were used to identify students' weaknesses and to help to remedy them in small flexible groups. This process occurred mostly in lower grades where the reading specialist and reading recovery teachers had to compensate for fewer educational deficiencies. Moreover, these analyses showed that the teachers did not provide students with strategies or content to perform well on the MSPAP tests. Two aspects of the problem were identified: either curriculum was not aligned with the MSPAP tests, or teachers were not able to do what was required of them. The remedy was seen in more attention to teacher preparation for instruction in two ways: first, the school focused on teachers training, and second, the school sought to monitoring teachers' weekly preparation for instruction.

Pacing Instruction with Lesson Plans and Narrowing of the Curriculum

The new curricula were supposedly aligned with the MSPAP tests, and teachers were required to follow the county's Scope and Sequence Document for the preparation of their lesson plans. In order to cover all required content and strategies in the class, teachers were required to prepare weekly lesson plans and have them available for inspection. The principal, the vice-principal, specialists, and district monitors checked the plans to see if they followed the prescribed curriculum. They also made frequents unannounced classroom visits to investigate if the teachers were following their lessons plans. Some teachers said that they developed a "double" life by creating two lesson plans: one for possible visitors, and one for the real classroom work, which depended on students' actual needs.

Although preparation of weekly plans was often described as useless for practical teaching purposes, teachers said that they complied with the mandate (C-14, C-15, C-16). In particular, teachers in the upper grades reported having problems following these lesson plans. According to two fifth grade teachers, the students were often not motivated for learning and not interested in the prescribed curriculum. In addition, many students were not at the grade level, and needed some background information before they could grasp new concepts. Teachers felt that students often did not grasp the importance of the prescribed topics in the curriculum. As a result, teachers needed to spend more time to make connections between the required curriculum and students needs. Frequently, they were forced to approach the content from different angles to motivate students. Unplanned events in the class, both at home and in the wider community, distracted students and made it hard for them to follow the mandated course content. According to the teachers, the constant arrival of new students and low attendance in upper grades posed serious problems with regard to their ability to follow detailed and content loaded curricula. If they wanted to cover the prescribed content, they did not have time either to motivate students or use the kind of teaching methods that require the more personal involvement of the students, e.g., cooperative learning, problem solving and discussion. Some upper grade teachers, at the school since it was placed on the reconstitution list, said that there was too much pressure to deal with a prescribed content all the time. A senior fifth grade teacher said:

> I don't feel good if I cannot answer students questions that are only indirectly related to the topic but are very relevant for the students and their development. Nor can I allow more engaged and lengthy discussions on topics we deal with. We just do not have time. Weekly plans have to be followed and I have to cover everything that is required. I do not have time to seize a precious "teachable moment" for developing students' motivation and their moral characters. These are young and needy students who have a lot on their mind and their interests are not directly related to the topics we have in the curriculum. We, teachers, need to develop links between the school goals and students needs, and above all make them interested in learning. But there is

> just no time to do that. We are too test oriented for the wrong reasons - to look good to the outside world not to help students to get them ready to carry on with education process. (C-16)

He stressed that everybody -- teachers and students alike -- got used to the test and learned how to perform better. While the School C students certainly demonstrated more knowledge on the tests, which was encouraging, he was not sure that these effects would last in middle school. Nor was he sure that students became more motivated learners.

The math teacher reported that his two ability groups were not large, between 12 and 15 students. However, despite the small number, large individual differences existed within the groups that needed to be addressed. He said that in the interest of his students, he frequently could not stick to his plans. He experienced conflicting emotions about his work in the classroom: on the one hand, his priority was students who had to master the concepts before moving on with the content; on the other, he didn't like to be singled out by the supervisors as a non-complying teacher. However, he and some others mentioned that the administration and monitors were mostly interested in the obvious signs of the MSPAP, i.e. that MSPAP words and objectives were displayed and that actual lessons at least approximated what was written on paper. Their concern was the content and the curricula which might appear in the MSPAP tests. Similarly, other teachers expressed their belief that a better balance between the MSPAP tests, curricula, and students needs was required.

Although the narrowing of curriculum due to the testing was not studied, there were several indications in interviews which spoke to this process. Teachers spent more time on reading, writing, and mathematics at the expense of social studies and science. According to the teachers, the prescribed curricula were extensive and they said they no longer had time for other things. Field trips, interdisciplinary projects, and hands-on activities, for example in science, were less frequent than in the past. One of the specialists described her concerns:

> I do not take my students to cultural institutions in the area anymore. There are many almost free concerts and other interesting performances for students to experience. We just do not have the time. This is extremely sad for our children whose parents don't take them out on weekends. An important cultural, educational and a motivational mission of the school has been neglected. (C-18)

Not only were there less of these activities, other signs of narrowing of the curriculum were also evident in the interviews. Although not studied in detail, they seem to be worth mentioning. The teachers reported that they did not take students to a computer class anymore. At the same time, some teachers reported that they didn't use computers in the classrooms because the computers were not hooked to the printers, or didn't have appropriate programs available for classroom instruction. Some simply admitted that they didn't know how to use machines themselves. Thus, the students could not learn even basic techniques regarding the use of computers as a writing tool. Regarding the school's lack of technology focus, one teacher explained that "computers skills are not measured by the MSPAP tests."

Teachers also reported that they no longer took their students to science labs, which had been a favorite activity. The teachers found science laboratories to be very beneficial for students because they allowed the students to perform types of hands-on activities that they were unable to do in their own classrooms due to a lack of equipment. Asked why they did not do these activities any more, there was not a clear answer. One teacher did not know why. Another said that the science specialist was too busy with his classroom. However, the majority simply said that science was no longer a school priority.

The Master Schedule and Departmentalized Fifth Grade Instruction

In the 1998/99school year, one of two major organizational changes impacting instruction at School C was the implementation of the master schedule, mandated by the county's educational authorities. It was directed towards strengthening reading/language instruction and mathematics, with the hope that this "back to basics" focus would bring about improved MSPAP scores. The master schedule, with the county's suggested daily time allotment for instruction, introduced 120 minutes of uninterrupted language and reading blocks in grades 1-3, and 90 minute blocks in the upper grades Mathematics was taught in 60 minutes blocks for all grades. The school day began at 8.10 am with the reading and language arts block followed by mathematics, social studies, and science. These subjects were broken up by music, physical education, and lunch breaks. School C strictly followed the master schedule with few exceptions, which had to be approved by the district office.

Some teachers commented that this new rigid arrangement discouraged the use of an interdisciplinary approach in their teaching. As a result, projects, team teaching, and field trips became rare events in the school.

The new master schedule enabled the school to create 90 minute planning blocks for grade level teachers to meet weekly so as to plan their work and discuss classroom strategies. According to the vice- principal, before the implementation of the master schedule teachers had to find time for cooperation after school. However, in practice, the majority of teachers did not find time to bond and work together. While most teachers reported that these meetings helped them to prepare for class, not all teachers shared the same feelings about these planning sessions. A few teachers reported that time was not always efficiently used, nor was it suited for their personal needs. One teacher expressed that these planning sessions were really not the place where they could discuss their real classroom problems in part because specialists and administrators also attended the sessions. Regarding this fact, he said:

> If something did not work for you, there is no forum to discuss it freely and openly. We just do it the way it is prescribed at least when we are observed. The visitors are very critical. You do not want to stand out and being reported as the one who does not follow what is required. (C-15)

In order to improve the MSPAP test scores in the fifth grade, the teachers pushed for departmentalized instruction which was introduced in 1998/99. In interviews, teachers reported that they liked this division of labor for several reasons. In the past, it happened that teachers spent more time on the subject they liked and/or were better prepared for. With this change, it was assured that every class got the same amount of time in each subject that was taught by the best-qualified teacher in the school. Teachers also taught what they liked best, and they also had more time to prepare for each topic. The fifth grade teachers thought that the fifth grade departmentalization positively influenced the MSPAP test scores.

Summary

As with Schools A and B, School C is an elementary school located in a suburban area adjacent to a large urban center. Approximately 65 percent of the school's overwhelmingly

African American population qualifies for free and reduced lunch and 100 percent receive Title I services. The school is highly transient, distinguished by a student mobility rate exceeding 50 percent and high teacher turnover. The year preceding School C's placement on the reconstitution-eligible list, 12 veteran teachers left the school and were replaced by mostly new and inexperienced teachers. The school was also characterized by extreme overcrowding with thirteen portable classrooms utilized to capture student overflow.

Here, as in School B, the school's long-term principal survived the reconstitution-eligible designation. When School C was identified as reconstitution-eligible in 1998, the school's performance scores had hit the bottom for the entire county. The school's severe overcrowding and fractured staff relations only served to exacerbate School C's woes. Upon identification, the district changed the school's catchment area and hence solved the overcrowding problem. By the next school year, student enrollment had declined by 25 percent and the student-teacher ratio had improved considerably. Nonetheless, a good number of faculty members transferred out of the school yet again.

The state's announcement of School C's reconstitution-eligible status did not come as a surprise to most teachers. In fact, the teachers and administrators welcomed the status for the money and help but most abhorred the way it was communicated to them and to the world. However, School C's placement on probation did surprise the veteran principal, who only a few months before had received state recognition for the improvements made by the school during the 1995/96 school year. As with the principal in School B, School C's principal became proactive in face of reconstitution-eligibility's threat. For instance, in using his own networks in the community, he successfully recruited teachers with high professional standards from neighboring private schools into the school.

The principal also set out to implement a series of school improvement strategies focusing on test score diagnostics and curriculum reform. Though tailored to the elementary grades, the school improvement strategies selected by School C were similar to those described for Schools A and B. For example, the principal delegated the role of instructional leader to his district-funded specialists and backed up their authority with classroom visits, write-ups, and paternalistic control. School C also found a reading specialist who was not only able to hold her own in the area of testing diagnostics, but who also went on to prepare daily teacher lesson plans aligned with the county reading curriculum that were MSPAP-appropriate.

In addition to these curricular changes, several other organizational changes were made at School C. A master schedule and departmentalization of fifth grade instruction were introduced. Common planning time for grade teachers was provided to help foster collegial interaction. Professional development was high on the school's agenda and teachers praised it as very useful.

As in School B, the combination of technical assistance and paternal enforcement opened classroom doors and, in the case of this school, instructional strategies penetrated deeply into the daily classroom routines of primary grade classrooms. Particularly, novice teachers became eager recipients of the reading specialist's help. In the upper grades, however, the influence of instructional specialists on the classroom was weaker. Some teachers expressed disillusionment about the new requirements mandating them to closely follow weekly lesson plans and prescribed curriculum, primarily because they did not afford teachers the time needed to adjust instruction to students' needs or motivate for them for learning. Despite these critiques, the school was able to raise test scores substantially in two consecutive years. Notwithstanding the school's success, however, by the end of the 1999/2000 school year teacher morale was low and a substantial exodus of faculty, including the reading specialist and principal, was expected.

While in some respects the paths taken by the three schools described so far are due to unique site factors, most notably the principals' tenure, authority, and personal leadership style and the savvy of instructional specialists, district conditions and policies played a role as well. Reconstitution-eligible schools are only a small percentage of all schools in this large district so that the district was able to concentrate funds and human resources on these schools. As a result, it enabled the division of labor between the principal as the overarching authority and the specialist as the instructional leader. Furthermore the district operated an office of school improvement that was in close touch with the schools and provided technical assistance on the set of strategies and interventions that were enumerated in school improvement plans, but the office also issued clear directives, at times to the displeasure of schools. Lastly, district officials protected seasoned principals who were given a chance to learn.

SCHOOL E

by Kim Curtis
with the assistance of Betty King

Background/Organization

School E is an elementary school located in the heart of a historic African American business center in a large Maryland city. As with many cities traditionally reliant upon manufacturing and shipping for their economic well being, the city has fallen on hard times in recent decades. Although a major renovation of the downtown and waterfront areas has increased the influx of higher income individuals into some areas of the city, it remains chiefly composed of working class and poor citizens. Approximately two thirds of the city's population is African American and the other third is predominantly white. Like other urban centers in the nearby area, the city continues to decline in population. Throughout the 1990s, the city lost approximately 100,000 residents (14 percent of its total population), many having moved to nearby suburbs in the surrounding counties. During this period, the city has also gained a reputation for its extremely high rates of teenage pregnancy and drug use.

These troubles are mirrored in the neighborhood in which School E is located. Despite its rich history as a cultural and economic center for the city's middle class African American population, the neighborhood is now home to some of the city's poorest residents. Predictably, the neighborhood suffers from the traditional inner city afflictions of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, incarceration, and premature death due to violence, AIDS, and inadequate healthcare services. With a housing vacancy rate that is dramatically higher than that of the city in general, the neighborhood population is highly transient.

However, in spite of the many negative influences prevalent in the neighborhood, the school serves as a center of positive community development. Through partnerships with School

E, local businesses and community organizations provide mentoring services and student incentive awards to the school; churches provide tutorial services, clothes, and after school and summer programs; and the Police Athletic League, located just across the street from the school, offers recreational activities. The school has also benefited from a traditionally strong parent volunteer program. However, teachers and school administrators note that recent changes in welfare policy requiring mothers to work have dramatically reduced parental involvement in the school.

Reflecting the neighborhood in which it is housed, the student population of School E is overwhelmingly African American and poor. In 1995, when the Maryland State Department of Education first declared the school reconstitution eligible, the school enrolled just one white student out of a total of 414. At that same time, approximately 90 percent of all students qualified for free and reduced price lunches. In the ensuing years, these demographic statistics have remained more or less unchanged.

Outside the school, empty lots and vacant houses invite drug activity and other crimes. In fact, the entire row of houses behind the school is virtually vacant and serves as a haven for drug dealers. While the exterior surroundings of the school are clearly indicative of an impoverished and neglected neighborhood, the school itself provides a welcome contrast to this bleak landscape. When approaching the school, one immediately notes the colorful abstract design painted on the overhead walkway connecting the school's two buildings. Inside, bright colors and attractive displays abound throughout the interior of the building, giving it a warm and inviting feeling. Hallways are spacious and bright, allowing for student writings and artistic displays to be posted. The inside of the walkway that connects the two sections of the school is entitled "A Walk Through History" and tells the story of notable African Americans through portraits and historic artifacts.

School E houses two computer laboratories, a cafeteria, auditorium, media center, administrative office suite, and 30 classrooms each stocked with computer terminals for use by students during class. Constructed in 1974, the school provides modified open space instructional areas for the majority of its students. Pre-K and kindergarten are housed in the basement, first and second grades on the first floor, third and fourth grades on the second floor, and fourth and fifth grades on the third floor. School E's large special education population is located in nine self-contained classrooms located on the first and second floors. These instructional areas are connected to the gym and cafeteria through a connecting overhead walkway. School administrative offices are located on the first floor of the main building.

During the 1997/98 school year,[1] staffing for School E included: one principal, an assistant principal, 14 elementary teachers, two early childhood teachers, 11 special education teachers, one admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) manager for special education services, eight teacher assistants, one part-time art teacher, one part-time librarian, three part-time support personnel (nurse, psychologist, and social worker), one clerical worker, one custodian, and five cafeteria workers. Reflecting the student body's composition, approximately 75 percent of the school's teaching staff was African-American. In addition, the teaching staff was predominantly female.

School E serves children from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The school operates both a primary (grades pre-K through two) and an intermediate academy (grades three through five), with each academy meeting as its own team division. Each academy or team has its own master teacher charged with providing curriculum direction. The school has at least two classes per grade level and the teachers have weekly opportunities to meet on grade level. School-wide faculty meetings are held once a month.

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[1] Year of entry by research team.

In 1998, the school introduced a phonics-based reading series, *Open Court,* for grades K-2 and a literature-based reading program offered by *Houghton-Mifflin* for grades 3-5. In both cases, district officials mandated the implementation of these highly prescriptive programs due to a large influx of inexperienced and uncertified teachers into the district. Commenting on standardized nature of these lessons, one teacher commented: "…it's scripted; it goes top to bottom. You just read the next thing on the page and go along and do it" (B15). The school also taught math and science utilizing district-wide curricula that promoted a hands-on, inquiry-based approach through the *Mathematics, Applications, and Reasoning Skills* (MARS) and *Science, Thinking, Application, and Research Skills* (STARS) programs. In addition, *Dimensions of Learning* was employed as an orienting instructional framework. Also in accordance with district directives, students received a 150-minute block of reading instruction each morning and enrichment courses of gym, music, and art classes offered once every other week.

School E's educational load reflects a level of poverty and instability significantly higher than the district average. What makes this particularly noteworthy is the fact that School E's district is the poorest district in the state of Maryland. The school's high rate of poverty makes it eligible for school-wide Title I services. In addition, the school's poverty rate qualifies it for the Universal Lunch Program which provides free lunches to the entire student body. In terms of mobility, the combined student entry and exit rate hovers around the 50 percent mark. During the first five months of the 1998/99 school year, 216 out of approximately 450 students either entered or withdrew from School E. Because the school serves as a citywide site for special education and autism programs, special education students comprise approximately 25 percent of the student body. Notably, this number of special needs students exceeds the district average by approximately 10 percent.

This combination of extremely high poverty, transience, and special education students makes the teaching and learning environment at School E particularly challenging, even more so than at the average reconstitution-eligible school. The table below presents information concerning School E's educational load for the period from 1994 to 2000. This period corresponds to the year preceding School E's identification as a reconstitution-eligible school all the way through the last year for which such data is available.

Year	Free/Reduced Lunch	Entrants/ Withdrawals	Special Education	Attendance Rate	Title I	Limited English Proficient
1994[2]	99.8	30.0/21.7	22.8	92.3	66.3	0.0
1995	96.4	22.7/30.1	25.3	91.2	61.9	0.0
1996	93.1	19.7/25.4	24.9	93.9	100.0	0.0
1997	99.6	22.0/23.4	27.7	94.1	100.0	0.0
1998	90.4	19.8/21.6	26.9	93.7	100.0	0.0
1999	91.2	33.7/41.5	23.4	93.3	91.4	0.0
2000	83.1	42.1/37.6	23.5	89.4	100.0	0.0

Teachers' reports of student backgrounds are consistent with the school's educational load statistics. One young teacher described her students in the following manner: "They're a lot of lead poison cases, fetal alcohol syndrome, some crack babies. A lot of them come from group homes, a lot of single parents, a lot of parents my age or younger" (E10).

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[2] Data from this testing year used to declare School E reconstitution-eligible.

Performance History

MSPAP performance

With a long history of low performance on the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) declared School E reconstitution-eligible in early 1995. Notably, School E was the first elementary school in the state to be placed on probation. In 1994, the school had been given a warning to improve. However, with school performance actually declining in the ensuing year, the state made good on its threat to designate the school reconstitution-eligible in 1995. The year the school was placed on probation, less than 10 percent of its students met the state's established achievement targets. During the next two years, the school met with modest success as test scores for third and fifth grade students increased across the board. With a total school-wide composite index score of 14.8 in 1996, School E even exceeded the district's average. However, by 1998 this momentum had evaporated and the school had returned to single digit satisfactory achievement. On the basis of School E's 1999 MSPAP scores, the state decided to turn the school over to a private contractor for operation. The tables located below provide information concerning School E's performance on MSPAP for the years 1994 through 2000. The shaded boxes indicate the year in which School E obtained the highest scores in the seven-year period under review.

Table 1 – School E MSPAP Reading Scores 1994-2000

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Grade 3	0.00	6.5	15.0	3.6	5.4	5.6	0.0
Grade 5	6.0	2.6	2.1	7.5	2.0	0.0	2.3

Table 2 – School E MSPAP Math Scores 1994-2000

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Grade 3	0.0	12.9	28.3	13.2	3.2	1.8	0.0
Grade 5	0.0	10.3	17.0	24.1	16.1	21.7	2.0

Table 3 – School E MSPAP Composite Index 1994-2000[3]

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total Composite Index	1.3	8.3	14.8	10.0	6.6	6.4	4.4
Grade 3 Composite Index	0.3	10.5	20.0	8.6	4.1	6.4	1.3
Grade 5 Composite Index	2.2	4.7	8.2	11.7	9.2	6.6	8.5

An analysis of School E's pattern of achievement throughout the last several years indicates that the school's reconstitution-eligible status provided an initial test score bump that ultimately proved to be unsustainable over time. A variety of reasons have been cited for this more or less perpetually low performance. The principal attributed the school's initial low scores to a general district-wide disregard for the importance of MSPAP. Believing that neither her school nor the district had taken steps to align the curriculum to the requirements of the MSPAP test, she commented:

> I had taught some of these children. I had worked with them, so I wasn't willing to believe that they did not possess the intellectual capacity to be successful. It was that they were confronted with a very different way that the intellectual capacity was to emerge from them. (E7)

More recently, the principal pointed to the "vast turnover, in terms of retirements, resignations, and firings of personnel" (E7) as contributing to an unstable learning environment for students.

Alternatively, some teachers highlighted poor instruction in the lower grades that did not adequately prepare students for the rigors of the test. Still others commented on the district's whole-language reading instruction policy that had been implemented for a few years but subsequently discarded in favor of a phonics-based program. When asked about the school's return to low reading scores after experiencing a few years of limited success, one third grade teacher noted: "The last group of kids we saw the test scores go up, that was my last group of basal readers. And the kids you're seeing now are the kids who went through whole language" (E15).

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[3] The Composite Index is a statistic developed to provide an indication of the average performance of students across all six content areas of the MSPAP.

In addition to these in-school factors, most teachers were also prone to blame students' low socioeconomic status and difficult home environments for their poor showing on the MSPAP test. Regarding the problems faced by teachers in educating the school's student population, one teacher commented:

> I know if I was some of these children's age and going through some of the things that they go through on a daily basis... some of them even view as normal, you know, I wouldn't be able to perform either. So, even some the kids that have the worst behavior that you can see, it's [because of] so much going on outside that they have to deal with. (E8)

Similarly, another teacher commented:

> They have a lot of potential that's not exercised. They come from a very low socioeconomic area, which is something we have no control over. We can't make them rich. I also see children who aren't getting a lot in their first three years of life, when they make the greatest gains... so when they come to us, they're already so far behind and they're almost to the point where they're turned off by learning. They've been told so often that, "Leave me alone," or "I don't have time for you," or they'll watch television, that when you get them in kindergarten, they have no desire to want to learn anything. (E3)

Indeed, without support from home, many teachers believed that improving test scores would be an uphill battle.

The school's 1999/2000 school improvement plan (SIP), written by School E's teachers and administrators, makes reference to the following factors as negatively impacting student MSPAP performance: 1) the inability of students to read independently; 2) the negative effects of district's previous whole language reading program; 3) a student mobility rate in excess of 50 percent; 4) lack of teacher preparation; and 5) inconsistency in the quality of the teaching staff at grade three. These explanations more or less mirror those responses obtained from teachers in the interviews conducted for this study.

Discipline

Although the incidences of suspension and/or expulsion from School E were relatively low (averaging just five percent of the student population), numerous teachers commented on the school's persistent "discipline problem." Indeed, when surveyed, the majority of teachers found student discipline to be the top challenge facing the school improvement process at School E.

An analysis of school discipline data conducted by School E indicated that a small number of male special education students in the upper intermediate grades were primarily responsible for the majority of the recurring infractions. This behavior was attributed to the lack of positive male role models in the lives of the students, the high incidence of poverty, dysfunctional families, peer pressure, and high mobility rates. One staff member agreed with this assessment when she noted her belief that classroom disobedience was largely due to the fact that students were "angry with something that happened at home" (E1).

Teachers place blame for students' discipline problems on both their socioeconomic background as well as the inattentive nature of many of their parents. Although most teachers note that they have some parents who are genuinely engaged in their child's education, most portray parents as generally uninvolved and uninterested. The vice principal summed up this sentiment when she noted: "…we have parents on patrol, we have a parent who has become a substitute and a couple other parents that are basically faithful but not to the degree when you look at it compared to the number of the students you have" (E2).

While many teachers were sympathetic to the causes of the students' misbehavior, they felt that it took away from their ability to teach effectively. Signaling her concern about undisciplined students remaining in the classroom, one staff member commented:

> If you got a child coming in intentionally wanting to disturb the class and you have another child coming in looking forward to learning what they have been taught yesterday and wanting to know more, then the child who wants to be a distraction should be pulled aside… (E5)

Another teacher who vividly remarked that she had seen first graders "stand up here and sass you like a dog" voiced her frustration at School E's lack of discipline when she noted: "This is a place where you're educated. It is not a playground… my job is not to yell all day…" (E12).

In interviews, teachers expressed their belief that the administration was largely indifferent to matters of classroom misbehavior. A scant 10 percent of those teachers completing a confidential survey believed that rules for student behavior were consistently enforced at School E. Without repercussions from the administration, many teachers felt that punishing their students was a futile effort. In fact, one teacher went so far as to indicate that she "just stopped sending students to the office" because "they just sit there or help out in the office" (BK field notes). Additionally, more than one teacher wondered why the in-house detention program outlined in the SIP had not yet been implemented.

Attendance

Over the years, maintaining an attendance rate that approximates the state's satisfactory standard of 94 percent posed a significant challenge to School E. Despite remaining slightly below the state's standard, the attendance monitor and school administrators went to considerable lengths to increase attendance. For example, administrators were known to visit students' homes in the mornings to make sure their parents send them to school. In addition, the school developed several incentive programs to raise attendance including parent workshops and rewards for perfect attendance. To allow for closer scrutiny, teachers were provided with telephones in each of their classrooms to allow them to monitor the attendance of their own students. The principal and the administrative secretary also devised a procedure to monitor parent responsibility for student attendance that required parents to sign their students in to school on a daily basis. Parents failing to comply with this procedure were subject to a court hearing, which could ultimately result in removing the child from the home.

In spite of these many efforts, the attendance monitor still noted that compliance was frequently difficult to obtain. She outlined her struggle to improve attendance in the following manner:

> [Students] are dealing with a lot out in their neighborhoods and streets, you know. It's a lot of drugs and everything. I make home visits to try to get the children to come to school. I make conference meetings with parents. Most of the parents don't show up until I take them to court. I can do court referrals and then I get their attention, and it shouldn't take that. (E1)

In her interview, the attendance monitor commented that she had nine court hearings scheduled that month alone for parents who had refused to send their children to school on a regular basis.

Stability

Although the principal was a fixture at the school for more than a decade, in recent years School E suffered from a remarkable level of instability both in terms of its student population and faculty members. With approximately half of its children either entering or exiting the school each year, the student body was notable for its highly transient nature. As a result, teachers were forced to adjust to a constant stream of new faces coming into their classrooms throughout the year. Regarding the struggle to keep up with the influx of new students in her room, one teacher remarked: "Did you see me say, 'What's your name? What's your name?' I barely know the ones I'm responsible for, much less the visitors" (E15).

In addition, this high level of mobility meant that teachers had to cope with students who had been exposed to a variety of different learning environments throughout their elementary careers. Importantly, this state of extreme student flux goes against the assumptions of MSPAP, which presumes that the stability of both teachers and students will produce incremental growth in yearly achievement. Unfortunately, with 50 percent annual student turnover, teachers lack a concrete knowledge base upon which to build students' skills.

The high rate of teacher turnover at School E only served to compound the school's inability to provide a stable learning environment for its students. Teachers and administrators, alike, recount stories of drastic measures taken to compensate for the staffing shortages caused by numerous teacher departures. For example, during the 1998/99 school year the lead technology teacher, who was already spending two weeks out of each month teaching third grade, was forced to give up these duties in order to take on a first grade class after four first grade teachers suddenly left mid-year. As she noted: "...we're pulling people from everywhere trying to fill in the gaps" (E15).

The situation did not improve the subsequent school year when, in what had become a familiar pattern, two third grade teachers left the school by December. Again, the principal was forced to reassign teachers and hire long-term substitutes lacking educational backgrounds to accommodate the deficit.

These mid-year departures were indicative of many teachers' inability to cope with the circumstances in which they found themselves as the daily challenges of working at School E took their toll. Describing her motivation to stay as a day-by-day effort, one teacher indicated that she wanted "to quit a hundred times" her first year at the school (E15). Another teacher, when asked how she saw herself as a teacher commented: "Sometimes I perceive myself as frustrated, other times I perceive myself as involved… and then there are times that I see myself as I just want to give up and walk out" (E16). When surveyed, teachers cited the challenging student population, low pay, better career options, and pressure from reconstitution-eligibility as the major contributors to the high rate of teacher turnover at School E.

In general, School E hired young, inexperienced, and frequently unqualified teachers to replace departing teachers. During the 1997/98 school year, 53 percent of the school's teachers possessed between one and five years teaching experience. By the following school year, this number had risen to 78 percent. Among these teachers, average experience amounted to just 1.6 years. Even more troubling was the fact that of the 14 new teachers hired that year, only two met district certification standards and just one possessed a background in elementary education. With so many new and inexperienced staff members arriving at the school each year, the administration was forced to continually introduce a new cohort of teachers to MSPAP techniques and objectives. As a result, the school was prevented from developing a stable cadre of well-trained professionals capable of providing the type instruction needed for its students to meet the state's rigorous achievement standards.

Table 4 – Teachers with One to Five Years Teaching Experience

School Year	1-5 Years
1995/96	60%
1996/97	40%
1997/98	53%
1998/99	78%

A quote from the 1999/2000 School Improvement Plan sums up the school's persistent instability when it noted: "A review of the mobility data indicates that the overall effect is that every year we start with new students and staff." Indeed, it is fair to describe School E as a school in a state of perpetual flux. By the year 2000, just eight of the school's 32 staff members had been at School E when it was placed on probation in 1995. Even the principal, who for years had provided the school's only main source of stability, had left the school due to retirement.

Reaction to Probationary Status

Initial reaction

As noted earlier, School E was the first elementary school in the state to be classified as reconstitution-eligible. The Principal was informed of the school's new status in a meeting with MSDE officials during the spring of 1995. Angry, disappointed, and embarrassed, she reported taking the news very personally and thought it was a negative statement about her "instructional leadership" (E7). She described her initial reaction to the school's status as a "very negative cast over the school and over me" (E7).

Because recon-eligibility was still novel in the state, the media scrutiny was intense. The principal was quite angry about both the level and tenor of coverage received by the press and believed that it exacerbated an already problematic situation within her building. In particular, she criticized the reporting as dwelling too heavily on negative "snippets" rather than presenting an "in depth discussion" of the school's actual situation (E7).

She believed that the initial effect of this negative publicity was to lower morale among the staff. As she noted: "…it had gotten to a point that it didn't matter if a cat were run over, they would flash our school, and so, people began to want to bow their heads when they came into the building" (E7). Teachers, too, were dismayed by the media attention. One teacher recounted a run-in with the news media in the following manner:

> You know, they came and all the news cameras were here and of course the only teacher that they caught on television was me walking my children down the hall. I said, "Now every person in this state is going to say, 'There's the teacher that

> represents a poor and failing school.'" And it was just heartbreaking because it wasn't the case… (E3)

To help subvert the negative impact of the label and its associated media attention, the school made plans for a "bounce-back rally." Letters and fliers were sent to parents and community members inviting them to a celebration honoring the school, its teachers, and students. The unofficial theme of the rally was "We are not failures!" In an attempt to repair morale and promote unity, the principal commented that she and the staff " got out on the front of our building with the loudspeaker… and sang songs to the tune of 'Say it Loud, Say it Proud'" (E7).

While the rally might have eased tensions to some extent, the news of School E's placement on the state's reconstitution-eligible list came as a stigmatizing blow to many at the school. Teachers reported being angry, embarrassed, and ashamed of their new status. In response to the news, some teachers were belligerent and defiant, exclaiming that they were doing as well as could be expected given the school's circumstances. In particular, teachers felt unfairly singled out given the particularly challenging student population: the "Special Education Magnet" of the city as one respondent termed it. Teachers' initial reaction towards the state was summed up by one teacher in the following way: "Basically, if you think you can do it better, come in, step in, and feel free to show us how to do it any better than how we've been trying to do it" (E3).

However, while some veteran teachers were disappointed by the news, they reported not being particularly surprised by it. Reflecting this sentiment, one teacher commented: "I knew there was a need for change" (E21). Noting the poor performance and bad behavior of the students, the apathy of parents, and the absence of accountability from the administration to enforce rules and monitor teacher performance, these teachers believed they "saw it coming."

Among teachers who had arrived at the school in the wake of its reconstitution-eligibility, sentiments were much more tempered. While some teachers had been transferred by the district, most chose to work at School E of their own accord. In interviews, not one teacher expressed trepidation about coming to the school because of its reconstitution-eligible label. In fact, some teachers even commented that they were pleased to be at the school. For instance, the vice principal noted: "I'd worked in the school, I'd been in the school, so I kind of knew some of the things that were going on that were very impressive to me" (E2). Another teacher remarked that she had purposefully chosen to come to School E because she wanted to know how it felt to teach in a school with an "abundance of resources" (E4).

For those teachers newest to the school, initial reactions were generally nonchalant. Regardless of whether or not they had previous knowledge of the school's reconstitution-eligible status, they saw its impact on their teaching as minimal.

Threat/Fear

In interviews, while some teachers portrayed reconstitution-eligibility as an initial blow to their professional egos, they did not feel particularly threatened by the school's status. Indeed, not one single teacher reported believing that his or her job was in jeopardy. Several explanations were cited by teachers for what many may perceive as this counter-intuitive reaction to probation.

First and foremost, teachers felt confident in their ability as instructors. A full 67 percent of survey respondents described themselves as "very well prepared" for the year's teaching assignment. An equal number of teachers reported that they possessed the skills and knowledge needed for School E to meet the state's performance expectations. One teacher characterized his casual reaction to the threat of job loss in the following way: "...you know, it's like anyplace else. If you're not going to produce, they're going to let you go" (E8). Another teacher, when asked if she feared what might happen to herself as a result of reconstitution-eligibility declared: "I'm just busy trying to make improvements in the school. I don't have time to think about that" (E21). Further, the state's existing teacher shortage only served to insulate teachers from a sense of fear about their job security.

In addition, given the high rate of teacher turnover at School E, many teachers had arrived at the school in the years since it was initially declared reconstitution-eligible. Thus, their sense of responsibility for the school's status was mitigated. One new teacher noted that while she believed that reconstitution-eligibility had caused "a lot of tension" among her colleagues, she did not feel the tension because she was so new (E10).

Finally, a lack of perceived threat might have also resulted from the fact that the principal attempted to shield her staff from dwelling on the potential negative ramifications of reconstitution-eligibility. Teachers commented that they were constantly told not to worry about recon: "It's going to be alright." According to teacher recollections, this sense of security was reinforced by positive visits from state and district monitors. Some staff remembered times during the probationary period that the state superintendent came to visit the school, peered into the rooms to observe teachers' performance, and left with a "thumbs-up" for approval at what was being done. This gesture was repeated time and time again by state monitors and area executive officers.

Fairness

In general, staff members at School E did not believe that probation was a fair policy for their school. While acknowledging the school's low test scores, some teachers argued that "scores don't give you a complete picture of what children are capable of doing or what the staff has been doing with the students" (E4). In support of this perspective, one teacher noted: "There's a lot of brilliant people that don't test well" (E8).

More generally, while teachers accepted their role in the accountability process, they tended to highlight two reasons why they believe MSPAP is an insufficient tool for evaluating whether or not teachers are holding up their end of the educational bargain. First, teachers disagreed with the use of an assessment instrument that fails to hold students and parents responsible for their contributions to the educational process. Regarding this fact, one teacher commented:

> ...it's so many other dynamics that go with Johnny not being able to read, or Johnny not being able to perform on the standardized tests. And they don't all deal with teaching. You know, you might have a superior teacher, but if the only structure and guidance [the student] gets is from eight to three, you know, that's not enough. School doesn't stop once the bell rings. You know, school's an on-going thing. And if it's not the same type of rules and guidelines and, you know, someone really pushing you on it at home, a lot of that teaching goes out the door. Especially if they go from a real structured environment into a confusing, chaotic one. (E8)

Second, teachers did not believe that the state took into sufficient consideration the impact that poverty and poor academic preparation has on MSPAP outcomes. As noted earlier, the overwhelming majority of students at School E come from disadvantaged backgrounds and receive little in the way of school readiness skills in the first five years of life. Yet, teachers are held accountable for the same level of student performance that is expected of any other child in the state of Maryland, regardless of his or her socioeconomic background. One teacher summed up teachers' frustration in the following way: "I think that when the state takes a total look at the scores, they're not taking into consideration all of the factors with the homes that the children are coming from, the support that is being given" (E4). Another teacher went so far as to note her conviction that the press for high standards was potentially damaging to students. Regarding this fact she commented:

> A lot of times I think they're pushing [the students] too hard with things that they just cannot measure at this time. You know, sometimes they ask a kid who's reading on kindergarten level to jump to fourth grade level in two months, and I just think that you can not push them, OK? If a kid is reading on third grade level, he can go to fourth grade level. You can push him, but the ones that you leave behind, they just fall back farther and farther behind... And it's not only hurting them, it's hurting me, because I don't like to see kids fail. (E10)

Despite the skepticism about MSPAP's ability to accurately portray teachers and schools as non-performing, the overwhelming majority of those teachers interviewed reported being concerned about raising their students' test scores. Indeed, when surveyed, a majority of respondents reported that teachers now take MSPAP more seriously as a result of School E's reconstitution-eligible status. For many teachers, this concern centered on the school's reputation. As one teacher commented: "I don't like people driving by and say, 'Oh, that's the school we heard about on television. That's where the poor dumb kids are'" (E3). However, other teachers, particularly the younger ones, valued high MSPAP scores more intrinsically by tying test performance to the future success of their students. The following quote by a fourth grade teacher is representative of this sentiment: "...I have a couple of degrees, and I'd like to see [my students] do the same thing. I'd like to see them have that, and I think it is a disservice if you weren't trying to push them to that point" (E8).

But overall, despite their interest in ridding themselves of the "reconstitution-eligible" label, most teachers at school E did not seem to value MSPAP as an educational tool. When asked about MSPAP in the school survey, only 20 percent of teachers indicated that high test scores meant a lot to them. Further, just 27 percent of those surveyed believed that the MSPAP test reflects good instruction. Concerning this sentiment, teachers ranked MSPAP scores eighth out of 11 possible indicators of successful teaching; well below the completion of classroom tasks (first), class participation (second), and performance on teacher-made tests (third).

Leadership

Described as "visionary," "orderly," "supportive," and "strong" (E3, E10, E1), School E's principal was generally well regarded by the majority of her staff. A fixture at the school for more than a decade, she lent a much-needed sense of consistency to an otherwise unstable environment.

As noted earlier, the principal was extremely disappointed about her school being added to the state's reconstitution-eligible list. Believing that she was a victim of the district's inattentiveness to MSPAP, she expressed displeasure with the school district for not aligning its curriculum with the state's new assessment tool. After initial expressions of defiance, she soon started to explore the reasons for the school's low test scores and began to recognize the need to become better informed about performance-based pedagogy. In response, she visited other school districts to observe classrooms and engaged in conversations with fellow administrators with regard to strategies for school reform.

After extensive research and consultation, the principal became convinced that the success of the school depended entirely upon her ability to build the capacity of her teachers with regard to performance-based instruction. Thus, in the face of the school's reconstitution-eligibility, the principal expanded her presence in the school as an instructional leader and staff developer. She initiated a professional development program, modeled instructional methods in classrooms, and utilized budget funds and grant awards to staff the school with additional instructional specialists. These forms of staff development and training became the school's main school improvement intervention. Credited with seeing "the big picture," (E3), teachers and administrative staff members, alike, praised the principal for bringing this vision of school improvement to School E. As one teacher noted: "…she has a gift for organization and she would do well as any Fortune 500 company's CEO" (E8).

Over time, the principal garnered district-wide attention for her staff development activities. Increasingly regarded as a "star" by district administrators, she spent a great deal of time helping other schools on probation create their own staff development programs and school improvement plans. Indicative of her reputation as a district standout, a newcomer to the school noted that School E's principal had been "instrumental" in helping her former school assemble its school improvement plan once it, too, became reconstitution-eligible (E4). However, while she was busy helping other schools in the district to improve, progress at School E stalled.

Interestingly, while the principal spoke often of building teacher capacity, she did not seem to invest much energy in building the capacity of her administrative staff. Although she took pains to bring many leadership positions to the school (i.e. two master teachers, a lead technology teacher, and a lead science teacher), their authority with teachers appears to have been limited by the principal's personal involvement in all aspects of school improvement initiatives. For example, the principal presided over school improvement team meetings and conducted many of the professional development sessions herself.

Additionally, while she invested considerable energy in the staff development aspects of her job, she did not appear to exert herself as a building manager. Within the administrative office, it was the secretary, not the principal, who provided the most visible and authoritative presence. Frequently away from School E attending to district training activities, the principal relied on her administrative secretary to run the building in her absence. In response, the secretary willingly took on managerial responsibility for a wide variety of activities ranging from playground supervision to class dismissal to monitoring teacher attendance.

Some teachers critiqued the principal's lack of interaction with the staff on a day-to-day basis and reported her as uncommunicative. Regarding her concerns about the principal's leadership skills, one administrative staff member commented noted:

> She's not visible like I would like her to be. I don't feel comfortable in going to her and discussing certain things with her. She's not very approachable. She lacks people skills as well as the assistant principal. And in fact, I've told the assistant principal about this: you get far more out of people when you treat them with respect and you treat them as equals versus treating them like you're in an authoritative position over them. (E4)

Indeed, just five percent of those teachers surveyed believed that they played a role in discussing major school decisions and ensuring that they were carried out. Even a close ally within the administration acknowledged that the principal's vision for school improvement "doesn't always get translated down the ranks" (E3).

Collegiality

Utilizing a traditional model of administrative accommodation that provided teachers with great levels of autonomy in their day-to-day operations, the principal did not exert influence among teachers concerning the maintenance of a collegial working environment. While most teachers reported receiving peer assistance when it was solicited, not all teachers were viewed as willing to lend a hand. In addition, teachers highlighted the school's "closed door" mentality as an impediment to cross-classroom communication and a sense of concern for all students throughout the building. One teacher described this prevailing sentiment in the following way: "My classroom; shut my doors; these are my walls. I'll fix the twenty students here" (E3). Other teachers commented on the fragmented relationships among teachers from differing grade levels due to lack of interaction. Referring to teachers on other floors, one teacher stated: "It's like we know each other, but yet we don't know each other" (E10). Another teacher admitted that she didn't know what happened to any of her students after they left her kindergarten classroom.

However, beyond these fairly common complaints regarding the lack of meaningful interaction with fellow teachers, the vast majority of teachers at School E also reported substantial levels of conflict among the teaching staff. An indication of the fractured nature of staff relations is the fact that 65 percent of those teachers surveyed indicated that they resented being judged based on the performance of other teachers as measured by school-wide test scores. Regarding this situation, one teacher commented: "…even though you're busting your body in your classroom to get those kids' test scores up, get them prepared for the test, and everybody is lax about it, you know, it's not really fair to you. But it's really nothing you can do about the other people because you don't pay their salaries" (E10).

The rift between teachers was particularly strong between groups of old and new staff members. Interestingly, the principal's leadership strategies may have contributed to this "intergenerational" acrimony. The principal recalls that she used the newer staff as a "catalyst" to spur on the established staff to change practices. She acknowledged that as a result of this approach, "some of the seasoned teachers would take pot shots" at the newer teachers because "they knew that these young up-starts were setting a pace and a level of expectancy that they weren't going to be able to meet" (E7). However, instead of raising the level of staff performance across the school, this strategy appears to simply have led to the departure of some of the school's more experienced teachers. As the principal notes, these more experienced teachers "began to drop away faster than the new ones" (E7).

Also contributing to the conflict was a deep sense of cynicism among veteran teachers about the school district's proclivity for frequently changing instructional methods. As one experienced teacher noted: "Everything that comes down the pike, [the district] buys" (E12). Their sense that the district changed direction too often made these established teachers unwilling to embrace new reforms. A lead teacher commented:

> We found that most of the new people that are coming on board, maybe because they are new, because this is what's being taught in college, are much more flexible and much more open to change… And teachers who've been around for a while: "This is going to come and go. If I just bide my time teaching, something else will be coming next year." And that's kind of the mindset of a lot of older teachers, not to process it. It's going to go just like everything else. (E15)

New staff and administrators, alike, reported being frustrated by the intransigence of the older staff to "just do the job" (E21). However, given the district's history, they believed there was little within their power that could be done to effect substantive change among those teachers who'd just "had it" (E3). Noted one frustrated teacher: "…you can put the horse to the water but you can't make them drink it…" (E10).

School Improvement Plan

School E's first major challenge after being placed on the state's reconstitution-eligible list was to develop a school improvement plan (SIP). This plan would serve as a "blueprint for success" with regard to promoting school improvement in the targeted areas of achievement, climate, and attendance.

According to the principal, the initial SIP writing process was both confusing and frustrating for school staff members. While she praised the benefits of an in-depth analysis of school needs, she felt as though she received little in the way of support and guidance from the district office both in terms of content and formatting requirements. As a result, the school found itself continually submitting SIP pieces that were subsequently returned by the district as inadequate. Deeming the process a "cat and mouse game," she noted that the district wasn't "clear on what the plan should look like" (E7). Horror stories continue to resonate among administrators concerning how principals, including School E's principal, stood in line at district offices until very late hours in the evening to have school improvement plans redone, reformatted, or just copied.

Eventually, School E completed a voluminous document (nearly 200 pages in length) detailing the school's current status and action plan for reform. The principal believed that, although the work was at times difficult, the process was ultimately rewarding. As she noted, "what that document forced us to do was to begin to take a look at our school, and to look at it in critical areas" (E7). Reflecting the principal's emphasis on teacher training, the school's SIP included a staff development section with approximately 25 implementation strategies.

The group charged with writing the SIP consisted mainly of the principal, the assistant principal, the consulting teacher, and the master teachers. Widespread teacher participation was not evident in the writing process. However, membership on School E's school improvement team (SIT) was open to all. Despite the standing invitation, teacher attendance at these meetings was sparse.

SIT meetings were scheduled for 8:00 a.m. the first Tuesday of each month. Interestingly, these meetings were not organized around a discussion of the SIP's objectives and long-term goals. Rather, the agenda, set by the principal, was determined by more immediate concerns such as special events, testing dates, teacher observations, staff development opportunities, district and state mandates, and the budget. For example, if prominent visitors were expected at the school, time on the agenda was devoted to preparation for the event. Alternatively, if staff development activities were scheduled, time was spent on the logistics of assigning teachers to specific tasks and ensuring classroom coverage. Thus, instead of providing a discrete time each moth for analyzing and evaluating progress on SIP objectives and goals, these get-togethers served as supplemental staff meetings.

Instead of being the collective responsibility of the SIT, individual team members were charged with monitoring individual SIP goals. For example, the achievement goal was monitored by the principal, the attendance goal was assigned to the master teacher and the attendance monitor, the climate goal was assigned to the assistant principal, and the parental involvement goal was monitored by the parent liaison and the consulting teacher. Given that SIT meetings did not appear to be the chosen forum for discussing the manner in which the school was meeting its established SIP goals, it is unclear when and where such conversations took place at School E.

Three SIT subcommittees, which involved a significantly higher level of teacher participation, also met on a regular basis to discuss matters pertaining to the school improvement plan's three target areas: achievement, climate, and attendance. Those subcommittee meetings observed by research team members during the 1998/99 school year could be characterized as perfunctory and generally unproductive. For example, at one climate committee meeting scheduled for 2:30 p.m., team members did not begin to drift in until approximately 3:00 p.m. During the meeting, the facilitator utilized a checklist in lieu of a prepared agenda to assess the status of climate issues and members provided disinterested "yes" or "no" answers to her questions. After approximately 30 minutes, the meeting was quickly adjourned.

Interestingly, despite her acknowledged abilities in the area of staff development, the principal appeared to be unconcerned about the lack of teacher participation in SIT and subcommittee meetings. Instead, she spoke proudly of her accomplishments and progress in achieving school goals and elaborated on strategies the school had designed and implemented for school improvement.

Despite this lack of participation, School E's teachers believed they were well-versed in the details of their school's SIP. When surveyed, 35 percent claimed to be familiar with the plan in detail and another 40 percent claimed to be familiar with the sections relating to their work. In addition, in interviews, teachers consistently expressed their belief that the SIP drove school programs and activities. Commented one teacher: "I think basically what's in the plan is what we stick to. If something is in the plan, then that's what they try to implement" (E4).

While some teachers reported that the goals were "meetable," (E8) others had concerns that the SIP was full of activities that were unrealistic for School E. For example, when discussing the SIP revision process, one climate subcommittee member noted that a number of items were maintained not because they were realistic or because the teachers wanted them there, but, rather, because they "needed to be there" (E10). Another teacher indicated her concern that many of the SIP activities planned for that year had not yet been implemented at the school commenting that there are a "lot of things that are down and look good on paper, but it's not as you see it" (E4).

The school's long-range MSPAP goals might be characterized as similarly unrealistic. The 1997/98 SIP indicated that School E's long-range goal with regard to MSPAP was to have 70 percent of School E's students scoring "proficient" on the MSPAP exam by the year 2000. By the 1999/2000 school year, despite experiencing actual test score declines, the school's MSPAP goal remained the same with the target year pushed back to 2002. Interestingly, School E's school-wide 1999 MSPAP composite score was just 6.4 percent.

Strategies

Since being named reconstitution-eligible, School E set out to implement a number of strategies aimed at improving MSPAP performance. These strategies can be grouped into three broad categories: staff development, packaged instructional plans, and technology initiatives.

Staff development

The major thrust of School E's school reform strategies focused on staff development. As noted earlier, the principal's past work as a staff developer combined with her understanding regarding the reasons behind School E's poor MSPAP performance led her to create a teacher training program that emphasized performance-based instruction. Implementing this plan through her own initiative, she relied on the one half-day per week of release time for staff development activities provided by the district to conduct school-based training activities.

Despite early successes, district policies implemented in subsequent years served to limit the implementation of the principal's staff development program. For example, funding cuts during the 1997/98 school year eliminated the professional development early release days the principal had used to conduct her school-based training sessions. The school's frustration at the district's move is evident in the following passage from the School Improvement Plan:

> Because of a lack of release days for school-based staff development, new staff members are not receiving in-depth benefit from training, follow-up, coaching, discussion, action research, and professional exchange. The impact has affected all facets of the programming at [School E]. (SIP 99/00)

In addition, the district began to require teachers to attend off-site professional development sessions conducted by district training coordinators. Convinced that school-based training was necessary for her staff's success, the principal was left with the task of reconciling her own training agenda with that of the district. The result was an extensive staff development schedule for School E's teachers. For example, the 1996/97 SIP included 39 staff development meetings for teachers at School E, ranging from teacher training in various curriculum areas to data management training. The list included both training that the principal had selected for the teachers along with that required by the district. Lacking release days, the principal was forced to fit in her own staff development activities using one-on-one training sessions and monthly staff meetings.

However, School E's trouble with implementing its professional development agenda cannot be seen solely as the result of changes in district policy. Its school-based training program also suffered at the hands of the principal's increasing absence and high rates of teacher turnover. As noted earlier, increasingly removed from the building to assist with district-wide training activities, the principal became unable to follow through on her own school's professional development offerings. In addition, School E's exceedingly high rate of annual teacher turnover meant that the school received little sustained benefit from its training initiatives.

Adoption of district-wide reform programs

In addition to teacher training interventions, School E also adopted several district-wide curricular programs as a means to increase student performance. For example, *Dimensions of Learning* and cooperative learning were two teaching strategies that were recommended system-wide to serve as backdrops for all instructional programs. *Dimensions of Learning* is a five component pedagogical system with a focus on practical application of skills acquired, while cooperative learning affords students opportunities to work and learn from each other as well as developing students' individual strengths.

Despite professional development opportunities offered by the district in these programs, their classroom implementation at School E was not readily evident. For example, observations conducted by the research team during the 1998/99 school year revealed that while *Dimensions of Learning* charts displaying the various dimensions (i.e. Habits of Mind, Learning Applications, and Learning for a Lifetime) were available in classrooms, it was difficult to determine how teachers integrated the dimensions into student lessons.

Further, teachers seemed ill prepared to handle the classroom management responsibilities that MSPAP-oriented cooperative learning strategies fostered. As a result, rather than being provided with hands-on projects designed for completion by the group as a whole, students were instead given paper and pencil assignments and were expected to complete them independently while assigned to a particular group.

As noted earlier, during the 1998/99 school year, School E also implemented a new district-mandated unified reading program that focused on phonics for grades K-2 and literature for grades 3-5. Classroom libraries of trade books were purchased for each classroom to supplement this effort. In addition, the district mandated a 150-minute reading/language block. During this time period, students were supposed to engage in uninterrupted reading with a concentration on phonetic awareness for primary grades and higher order thinking skills for the intermediate grades.

The administration and staff welcomed this unified, phonics-based reading initiative and believed that it responded to the needs of their students. As one teacher noted: "I like *Open Court* and I think it does work. I've seen some progress with some of my children who attended my class from day one but couldn't read" (E16). Another teacher commented:

> I'm very comfortable with the program. It's a great program. It philosophically works well with a lot of things the children need. In the past, I've been here when we've been basal then we went to whole language and I saw the disaster that whole language was creating so philosophically this is in line with what I think the children in this neighborhood, in this school, in my class need (E15).

However, concern was voiced in some quarters about the ability of teachers to adequately implement the new program. Indeed, even though representatives from the publishing company were available for on-site training and consultation, a number of teachers appeared to have difficulties using the new program in their own classrooms. For example, even though the program was scripted on a day-to-day basis, some teachers had trouble keeping pace with the curriculum. One lead teacher, acknowledging teachers' slow progress in adapting to the day-to-day requirements of *Open Court* commented:

> Right, well once you get into higher level books, its not one lesson a day, it's a book like for two three days but [teachers] are under the impression it's meant for a week or six days. So they're spreading... they're spreading it out so much that now they're behind and when we tried to correct the situation it didn't go over well...(E15).

Other teachers had trouble managing the script, either reading it word for word or not being able to use their cue cards correctly. High levels of teacher turnover only served to exacerbate School E's implementation problems.

Packaged programs for math and science instruction, known as *MARS* and *STARS*, were also used at School E. While these programs were designed to emphasize problem solving and higher order thinking skills in accordance with MSPAP requirements, teachers reported that instruction in these subjects was frequently sacrificed due to the school's emphasis on reading and language. Of note is the fact that much of the school's staff development budget was allocated for training in these programs. However, teachers believed that district's reading policy made implementation problematic.

Technology

Featured prominently in its SIP, the administration viewed the addition of technology as an integral aspect of School E's improvement process. To this end, the school purchased two computer labs and created a new lead technology teacher position to help oversee all technology interventions. Students in grades one through three utilized the computer laboratories to reinforce and build skills in reading, mathematics, and writing. Students in grades four through five used the labs to focus on the development and application of performance-based activities. In addition, computer terminals were available in every classroom. However, training teachers to use computers to enhance their instructional programs proved to be unwieldy for the technology teacher. Frustrated with teachers' reluctance to use the classroom computers, she commented that it was a challenge "just to get teachers to turn [them] on" (E3).

An additional technology initiative brought to the school by the principal was access to satellite broadcasts of cable and distance learning programs. Here, too, operational problems hindered the potential utility of this innovative program as its implementation was abruptly curtailed mid-year when staffing changes eliminated the media specialist position and the technology teacher was forced to fill a vacancy in the first grade. Overall, the pervasive instability of the school's teaching staff coupled with a lack of skilled professionals served to prevent School E's technology program from meeting its proponents high expectations.

Denouement

Data collection for this case was conducted primarily during the 1998/99 school year. At this time, despite initial modest test score improvements experienced during the early years of probation, School E's MSPAP results were again on the decline. With virtually no long-term improvement to show for its four years of probation, awareness of and concern for reconstitution-eligibility was low among School E's faculty. Importantly, in the years following its placement on the reconstitution-eligible list, a large number of other schools in the district had also fallen under the state's watch. Thus, the shock, outrage, and stigma of reconstitution-eligibility that was once felt so severely among School E's faculty no longer appeared to register with much significance.

Under mounting pressure to improve its schools test score performance, the district sought to transfer the principal at the end of the 1998/99 school year. Instead of a transfer, however, the principal decided to take early retirement. With her left a group of senior teachers who had in many respects been the backbone of the school's improvement efforts. The school opened the 1999/2000 school year with a new and inexperienced principal and many uncertified teachers. Results for the Spring 1999 round of MSPAP testing, released in January 2000, showed that, again, School E had failed to make major improvements in its test score achievement. Soon thereafter, the state decided to reconstitute the school and turn it over to a private vendor beginning with the following school year. For the remainder of the year, teacher morale sank to an all time low as resentment and anxiety rose among teachers. MSPAP scores declined sharply, in many areas to "zero percent satisfactory."

The final task for School E's staff was to identify three schools where they wanted to be considered for further employment. This activity proved to be difficult for some because they had no desire to leave the school. However, with the exception of a few, all teachers were placed in new positions throughout the district. Those teachers that were contacted for follow-up study expressed displeasure with their placements.

Conclusion

This case study of School E provides a portrait of a school that received a nascent test score bump from its reconstitution-eligible status when motivation, money, and leadership were available resources from which the school could draw in support of its quest for school improvement. However, as several district schools were added to the state's probationary list and teacher turnover became epidemic, these resources dissipated. Additionally, fewer and fewer of the school's staff members felt responsible or even troubled by its status. Thus, the initial sting of reconstitution-eligibility was reduced to nothing more than a mild discomfort.

The pervasive instability found among both School E's students and faculty also added to School E's woes by making incremental growth in yearly achievement (a key demand of the state's accountability system) virtually impossible and by serving to hamper both the implementation and sustainability of School E's school improvement efforts. Year after year, the school was forced to start over yet again with a host of new teachers and students, each seeking to negotiate the particular practices and demands required of them by School E. Mired in this vicious cycle, little in the way of concrete performance improvement was realized. Thus, on the basis of test score stagnation, the state decided to remove School E from district control and reconstitute it. Currently operated by a private educational company, the state now waits and watches closely to see if this act of last resort yields positive results for School E.

SCHOOL G

by Lea Plut-Pregelj

Portrait of School G

School G is located in an ethnically mixed, middle-class residential neighborhood predominantly inhabited by Orthodox Jews and African Americans. Well maintained single homes with gardens, a small shopping strip, and a large high school are the main features of School G's immediate community.

The elementary school, built in 1950, functioned successfully for several years as a small neighborhood school. Enlarged and renovated in 1973, it became the first middle school in the district. Set up as a model school to exemplify a non-graded curriculum, the school was strongly supported by the students' parents and the community. Because of its innovative approach to teaching and its advanced academic program, the school attracted students from a wide area. For many years, this organizational setting worked well and the school was recognized for the excellent achievements of its students.

Changes in the Student Body

The character of the school began to change in the early 1990s. In the last decade, the ethnic structure of the neighborhood changed: more African Americans and small members of other minorities groups moved in, while Jewish residents moved out. Yet, it seems that the demographics of School G has changed more rapidly that its surrounding community. In the early nineties, 70 percent of the student body consisted of African Americans and 30 percent of Whites, while in the 1997/98 school year, when the school was declared reconstitution-eligible, 85 percent of student body were African Americans, 10 percent Whites and 5 percent Hispanics and Asians. In the same school year, just 20 percent of the student body came from the immediate neighborhood. The rest of the students were bused in from other, predominantly economically depressed areas of the school district. Two years later into probation (1999/2000), the school's African American population rose to almost 94 percent. Thus, the school population ceased to reflect the mixed ethnic structure of its immediate neighborhood. According to the teachers, the ethnic and socioeconomic structure of the school's student body was definitely influenced by the redrawing of the school's boundaries in the mid-1990s, and by the changing image of the school. In informal chats with a few elderly African American neighbors, a researcher learned that all of their children had attended School G, which, in their opinion, used to be a great school. The researcher was told that many younger parents now take their children to private schools.

Changes in the student body were also reflected in the school's educational load. In the last decade the number of students qualifying for reduced or a free lunch program rose slowly but steadily from about 40 percent in 1993 to over 60 percent in 2000 (See Table 1). The only large jump in the number of students participating in this program was in 1998 (over 10 percent), which coincides with the year in which School G was placed on probation. Also coinciding with the increase in School G's educational load were administrators' and teachers' increased reports of problems frequently associated with poverty, such as poor academic skills of the sixth grade students entering the school, extensive discipline problems, lack of parental involvement, and emotional stress of the students. According to the 1998/99 School Improvement Plan, 30 percent of the students did not live with their biological parents or in permanent settings. However, the educational load of School G was much lighter than that found in other schools on probation in the same district.

Table 1: Educational Load

Year	Free/Reduced Lunch %	Entrants/ Withdrawals %	Special Education %	Attendance %	Title I %	Limited English Proficient %
1996	47.9	6.0/ 8.5	12.4	91.7	0	0
1997[1]	44.8	7.9/12.0	8.6	91.4	0	0
1998	48.2	7.5/11.7	20.3	91.7	0	0
1999	59.7	14.4/16.4	14.0	91.3	0	0
2000	60.5	22.4/22.4	18.0	89.8	0	1.3

Deterioration and Overcrowding at School G

The appearance of the school building, at odds with the well-maintained properties around it, could hardly be described as a picture of a stimulating learning environment. After the first visit to the school, a member of a research team wrote in her diary (March 2000):

> Main entrance. Metal grids, painted blue. In front of the school there was a lawn with some bushes. I walked along the side of the school: an aluminum fence separated a patched asphalt space between the school and the sidewalk. Another entrance with gray metal grids and a chain. Windows with old, yellow shades; several of them torn. Dirty glass panes, waiting for a spring cleaning. Here and there some forgotten trash. I couldn't walk around the school. So I walked back, past the main entrance, and approached the building from another side. I entered the schoolyard. Yet, there was another entrance covered with metal grids. Gray. Beaten up. Small windows high up the building. Although it was Saturday, a few cars were parked on the asphalt area behind the school building. Two portables with no windows - a newer one attached to the school with yet another entrance, and the older, freestanding one almost in the middle of the yard, next to a huge empty dumpster. It looked like a tool shed.

However, although too small for the number of students and in need of repair, a walk through the school building gives a more pleasant impression of the school than its exterior. The entrance hall was decorated with students' artwork, trophies, and motivational banners. The school appeared clean and orderly; students and adults in the building were friendly to visitors.

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[1] Data from this testing year used to declare School G reconstitution-eligible.

Students in single-file lines could be seen either entering or leaving the school auditorium, cafeteria, or the school building at the end of the school day. During classes, the hallways were mostly quiet. However, they did become lively during the breaks when students changed classrooms. Walkie-talkie equipped adults (among them a police woman) monitored the hallways and controlled these occasional outbursts of adolescent energy (i.e. running and fights).

The L-shaped split-level school building had several self-contained classrooms and a large open space-classroom, which was converted into semi-closed classrooms during the summer of 1999. Two portables were situated in the school yard: one built 27 years ago to temporarily house the overflow of students; the other built in the summer of 1999 to accommodate the in-house detention center as well as an additional classroom. In addition to the classrooms, the school also had a few small semi-open spaces for small groups and individual instruction, an open library with a media center, an auditorium for approximately 300 students, a gym, a cafeteria, and a teachers' lounge. An extremely modest office area included small offices for the principal, security officers, a health center, a secretary, and a small conference room with a photocopy machine. The entrance to these offices was a closed-in hall, which formed a tiny, windowless multipurpose space for an attendance officer, teachers' mailboxes, a public phone, and "a triage center" for students and visitors. This locale was observed to be busy all the time.

The school has been severely overcrowded for several years. Although the renovated school was built for approximately 500 students, its enrollment between 1995 and 1998 fluctuated between 740 and 780 students. During the 1997/98 school year, when the school was placed on probation, 758 students were enrolled in the school. Thus, the number of enrolled students exceeded its capacity by approximately 50 percent. Since being put on probation, the number of students has been on the decline. Over a two-year period (1998-2000), the enrollment dropped by about 15 percent. In the 1999/2000 school year, the school enrollment was 633 students.

At School G, classes were large. The one exception was for special education classes, which did not have more than 15 students. However, researchers saw special education classes with as few as five students. While the district's norm for middle school classes is 29 students, the school administrators said that they were trying to limit classes to 32 students. However, several teachers reported in the interviews that their classes had up 40 students. A teacher with 14 years at the school commented: "This is the most I've had ever, even my first year here when I taught the regular curriculum, I never had one hundred and sixty kids. I think even then I had maybe one hundred and twenty. My largest three classes now are thirty-eight" (G-18).

Instructional Organization

Until the 1998/99, instruction took place in multi-aged, cross-graded teams of students and the curriculum taught was based on the district content curriculum guidelines. Sixth, seventh, and eighth graders were assigned to multi-age subjects according to their ability level. Students followed individual schedules, which beside core subjects included electives such as physical education, music, art, health education, and foreign language. Based on the individual students' progress, their schedules for English language and mathematics could be changed quarterly. Students, homogeneously grouped for mathematics and English, and heterogeneously for other subjects, received individual instruction for all academic subjects, if needed, and had access to the computer lab to reinforce their basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Poor academic performance on the MSPAP tests and the declining academic and social skills of the sixth graders who came to the school were the major reasons why School G decided to reorganize instruction during in the1996/97 school year. To ease the transition from elementary to middle school, an independent sixth grade team was formed. Despite this change, cross-graded instruction and individual scheduling - mixed classes of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders - were still found in 1998/99 when the school had five instructional teams: one six grade, one mixed sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and three seventh and eighth grade teams. Each team was divided into smaller groups for subject instruction. Perceived as chaotic and ineffective, the existing cross graded instructional organization was abolished in the 1999/2000 school year and was replaced with a graded curriculum and block scheduling in mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and reading.

The number of special education students in School G increased from 10 percent in 1993 to 20 percent in 1997/98, and fell slightly to 18 percent in the 1999/2000 school year. Identified special education students (levels I to V) received multiple types of services during each school day. The school strove to mainstream special education students. However, according to the principal and some teachers, it was not very successful. A special education teacher was assigned to help the regular teacher when special education students were included in regular instruction. Special education students also received individual tutoring. Students with more severe problems were instructed separately in small groups (up to15 students) that are taught by special education teachers and aides.

The School's Performance

The banner "Celebrating 20 Years of Success," hanging on the outside wall of the school no longer fits the description of the school, which was once known for its excellent academic programs and student achievement. The public image of School G slowly began to change in the early nineties. School G performed poorly on the newly constructed Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), first used in 1993. However, School G performed much better on the state's other indicator of academic success, the Maryland Functional Tests (MFT). In fact, the test scores for reading (97.2%) exceeded the state satisfactory standard (95%), while writing (86.0%) and mathematics (74.4%) were slightly below the state standard (90% for writing and 80% for mathematics).

Table 2: School G Performance Indicators

Year	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**
MSPAP CI [2]	**10.8**[3]	**19.0**	**22.2**	**21.3**	**16.0**	**19.4**	16.4	**24.4**
MFT-reading	**97.2**	**98.0**	**98.0**	**95.1**	**96.2**	**95.7**	91.7	93.7
MFT-writing	86.0	79.7	76.8	62.9	73.0	76.0	79.9	83.4
MFT-math	74.4	76.9	69.7	68.4	70.5	70.4	65.7	66.0

Despite the fact that school's MSPAP composite index was above the district's mean, the school's results on the MSPAP tests since 1993 have been low, particularly in reading. For example, only 6.3 percent of the eighth graders performed at the satisfactory level on the reading test. Students performing at the excellent level were very few.

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[2] The MSPAP Composite Index (CI) is the weighted average of the percentage of students achieving satisfactory or better performance across all test content areas.

[3] Bold numbers indicate results above district mean for the MSPAP CI and above the state level for MFT.

After 1993, School G's MSPAP test scores rose across the board and with the MSPAP composite index for School G peaking in 1995 (22.2 percent). However, the MSPAP composite Index and test scores for individual tested areas, except in the area of language usage, dropped considerably in 1997. And yet, the MSPAP composite index for School G was still above the district's mean.

Since 1993, the results on the MFT for reading dropped slightly but remained above the state satisfactory standard until 1998. Already below the state satisfactory standards, the MFT scores for mathematics and writing fluctuated, but generally declined in the ensuing years. For the period between 1993 and1996, MFT writing scores dropped by 24 percentage points. However, these scores began to increase in 1997 and, except for math, have almost rebounded to their 1993 level. As a result of overall declining school performance, School G was identified as reconstitution-eligible by the Maryland State Department of Education in January 1998.

Throughout the two and the half years of its reconstitution-eligible status, School G's MSPAP scores fluctuated. In the first year after being identified as reconstitution-eligible (May 1998), School G was able to slightly improve its MSPAP composite index by three percentage points. While the MSPAP scores in 1998 rebounded to the1995 level in almost every area tested, the scores in reading further declined from an already low 5.2 percent to 4.0 percent. The 1998 trend did not continue in 1999. The MSPAP composite index was down again by 4.8 percentage points, and for the first time, it fell below the district's MSPAP composite index. Although small gains were made in reading and writing test scores, declines were observed in all other tested areas. In some cases these declines were considerable, e.g. test scores for math dropped by 6.4 percent, and science scores dropped by 14.4 percentage points. However in 2000, the MSPAP composite index increased sharply by 9.8 percentage points to 24.4 percent, and was once again above the district mean. Large gains were made in all areas, except for the math scores where gains were rather modest. Particularly large gains were obtained in social studies and science. This large change in the MSPAP test scores coincides with the change of the school's principal and many changes that were implemented during her first year in the school.

After being placed on probation, the 1998/99 Maryland Functional Tests scores declined in both reading and mathematics. However, the test scores for both areas slightly improved during the 1999/2000 school year.

Discipline and Attendance

Besides academic performance, students' attendance and discipline are two additional factors that the state includes in its evaluation of schools. Discipline has been a serious problem at School's G for several years. In one way or another, teachers and administrators alike, spoke of discipline as the most crucial problem at the school and listed it as the major reason for low school performance. Discipline violations, resulting in long- and short-term suspensions, were observed to be increasing from year to year. The nature of these discipline violations included subordination, defiance, use of profanity, disruptive behavior, and improper attire. Data for individual school years indicated that long-term suspensions increased from two during the 1995/96 school year to eight in 1996/97. These suspensions were comprised of six weapons charges, a student attack on a teacher, and a student attack on a student. In 1996/97, there were 88 short-term suspensions and more than 100 in 1997/98. Of note is the fact that the number of suspensions for the 1998/99 school year greatly exceeded those reported during the 1999/2000 school year.

Open classroom space and the homeroom for the mixed grade team (sixth, seventh and eighth graders) were most often mentioned as indicators of a school that was out of control.

Individual groups working in the space were divided by light furniture. However, students were often found running around and playing. The noisy space, where teachers' voices competed with one another for students' attention, seemed chaotic to the members of the research group trying to conduct teacher interviews. Teachers' energy was spent dealing with discipline problems rather than preparing for class or teaching. As one interviewee described it: "I find very often that I'm so tied down with dealing with discipline problems, lesson plans, material is secondary" (G-21). In prioritizing the school's challenges, survey respondents also checked students' discipline most often as the school's top challenge for improvement. In fact, discipline was selected twice as frequently as other factors influencing school performance such as improving teacher-parent relationship, stabilizing faculty turnover, and teachers' motivation.

Two experienced teachers who taught advanced academic classes stated that discipline was, indeed, the number one problem in the school. However, at the same time, they both acknowledged that they personally had only minor problems in their classrooms. One of the interviewed teachers expressed his thoughts in the following words: "The problem in most of these schools is a complete inability to get a handle on discipline . . . I don't have a lot of disciplinary problems in my room, because, first of all, this is an advanced academic team"(G-1). In the interviews, teachers indicated that discipline problems were not just the consequence of students' upbringing and their home environment. They pointed out that the school's leadership and its instructional organization (i.e. large groups, cross-graded curriculum, the inclusion of special education students in regular classes, and ability groupings) as well as teachers' insufficient classroom management skills influenced discipline and school climate. Those teachers reported that the school leadership did not tackle discipline problem seriously until the1999/2000 school year, which again coincided with the arrival of the new principal.

School G's attendance rate, almost at the state satisfactory standard of 94 percent in 1993, dropped to 91.7 percent in 1996. The rate has remained at the same level since the school was put on probation, with a slight deterioration during the 1999/2000 school year (89.9 percent). The attendance rate broken down by grades or gender does not show any distinct patterns, although the rate for eighth grade was slightly lower than that found in the other two grades. The number of students missing more than 20 school days per school year also increased over the three- year period from 21.6 percent in 1998/99 to 26.5 percent in 1999/2000.

Teachers' Explanation of the School's Performance Decline

In 1998, when the research team entered the school, changes in the student population and deteriorating school climate were most often cited as the reasons for the school's low test scores. However, some teachers, both veteran and new, as well as administrators recognized that reasons for School G's low academic performance could be also found within the school itself: its organization, curriculum, and high teacher turnover. Not everyone was sure what should be done to take the school "out of the slump." They though that whatever they had been doing in the school as far as student academic performance and discipline, no longer seemed to work. As one teacher put it: "I think we need to change a lot of things because our environment is different and our clientele is different . . . I think there is a clash between tradition, reality and what we need to do . . . We have difficulty dealing with reality, and it is hard to let an ideal go" (G-12). The same opinion was also expressed by new teachers who stressed that the school's faculty and its leadership in particular, had difficulty in dealing with the changed student population who had transformed the school climate. They saw the school's new status as an opportunity be more responsive to students' needs and for the "new blood" to make changes in the school. Some new teachers and veterans alike questioned suitability of the school's instructional organization for its current student population. A veteran teacher spoke about cross-graded instruction and individual scheduling:

> It was a social experiment at the time and it worked well. It placed the students together, because, of course, we're not isolated communities. We're all age groups. It made a perfect sense . . .We had a major shift in the student population, and they were no longer able to handle the social setting . . . Well, we need to address their social setting . . . I think the model has to be changed. (G-12)

According to some teachers and administrators, it was impossible to bring students up to the eighth grade level that is tested on the MSPAP in just three years, given that both the math and reading skills of many sixth grade students were only at the third grade level.

Almost all interviewees, regardless of the length of their experience, expressed dismay about the physical conditions in the school and the policies that allowed the school to come to that point. When asked about the school resources, one of the school's administrators explained:

> Severely lacking, especially for the regular education child. It's a much needier population and the resources are not there in terms of numbers of teachers allowed within the building, allowed within the budget, in terms of the building itself, the physical space that's available, technology. We're way, way behind other subdivisions [districts?] because of budget constraints so the resources, and in staff development the resources are simply not there. (G-8)

Teachers expressed very similar, and even stronger views about the availability of resources at the school and the disparity between their school and those available in public schools in neighboring districts. A fourteen-year veteran teacher lamented:

> I think the state can do more as far as money goes. I mean I live in the [neighboring] county and I know what kinds of equipment, materials are available to those children in those schools where I live, the number of kids in the class. They wouldn't have thirty-five, thirty, forty kids in the class where I live. They wouldn't have it. The parents wouldn't settle for it. (G-18)

A parent of a former student, at present a volunteer at the school, explained to a member of the research team why he came regularly the school to help: There are not enough "warm bodies" here for these kids. The PE groups are huge. I do not know exactly how many. It varies from class to class, but many - sometimes over hundred. There is just one female teacher for all these kids. I really feel sorry for her."

Every interviewed teacher and administrator mentioned the lack of parental involvement in the school as an important reason for declining school performance. One administrator said:

> When I first started here and we had a P.T.A. meeting, within three block of this place you couldn't find a parking space. We don't have that anymore. During the day, parents would be volunteers. Parents put this school together. It was their impetus that formed [School G]....We don't have that kind of parental involvement any more. We used to pull from the middle and upper middle class black and white parents who were politically knowledgeable and involved. We don't have that any more. That's changed. (G-8)

However, most teachers did not talk about broader parental involvement, involved with the running of the school in general. Teachers saw parents as an important resource to help students at home with their homework and discipline. While teachers were aware that many parents were extremely busy, keeping two and three jobs to make ends meet, and that some were incapable of providing a stable home environment due to joblessness, imprisonment, and drug use, they still saw parents' help as a crucial element in students' achievement and ultimately, in improvement of the school's performance. During the 1999/2000 school year, School G worked hard to involve more parents in their children's education Parent-teacher conferences for students with discipline, attendance, or academic problems were scheduled on daily basis. The counselor, who came to the school with the new principal in the summer of 1999, organized a series of educational lectures for parents. Unfortunately, very few parents attended the first few lectures.

While the interviewed teachers broadly explained the reasons for the decline in the school performance, they rarely spoke of their own professional capacity. The exceptions were a few new teachers who mostly expressed a need to improve their classroom management skills.

Experienced veteran teachers felt overwhelmingly well qualified and prepared for the job. This finding is in line with survey responses, where 12 percent of teachers described themselves as adequately prepared and 71 percent described themselves as very well prepared. In interviews, the veteran teachers generally identified discipline and the general turmoil and frequent changes in the school as overwhelming and the reasons for students' low academic performance. They noted that they needed help with "stress management."(G-5)

Stability

According to the veteran teachers, School G was a stable institution until the mid-1990's. The change in stability has been attributed to various reasons: the population change in the neighborhood, the redrawing of school boundaries in 1995, and the naming of School G as reconstitution-eligible in 1998. These changes impacted teachers as well as students. Student mobility increased in the last four years. Not only were fewer students staying at the school all three years, but more and more students left or entered the school during the school year. The number of students entering increased from 7.3 percent (1997/98) to 22.4 percent (1999/2000); the same trend is also evident in withdrawals from 4.9 percent to 24.4 percent during the same time frame. During the 1999/2000 school year, 276 out of 600 students either entered or left School G.

Mirroring an increase in student mobility, teacher turnover has been high since 1996. A teacher in the fall of 1998 described teacher turnover in the following way: "We have a ton of new teachers at the school this year. We had a ton of new teachers last year. We had a ton of new teachers when I came in"(G-1). Eight out of 46 teachers left the school in 1996/97, another 18 out of 42 teachers in 1997/98, and 19 out of 39 teachers in 1998/99. For various reasons, six teachers left during the 1999/2000 school year. In informal conversation during the spring of 2000, some teachers were of the opinion that teachers' commitment to the school was low, and it would not be a surprise to see several more teachers leave at the end of that school year. This high teacher turnover served to change the profile of the teachers working in the school. While their general level of education was adequate, each possessing BA, with many already having earned MA or pursuing studies towards it, experienced teachers were replaced by new, mostly inexperienced ones. These new, but not necessarily younger teachers had less professional pedagogical training and less teaching experience. During the 1997/98 school year, 29 teachers held Advanced Professional Certificates (APC), nine had Standard Professional Certificates (SPC), while eight held provisional certificates. In the 1998/99 school year, the number of teachers with provisional certificate rose from eight to 14 and to 18 in 1999/2000, signifying that almost half of the teaching staff did not have teaching credentials.

The data indicate that the group of teachers with no teaching experience grew considerably larger in the years following the school's placement on probation. In the 1999/2000 school year, out of 39 teachers, 16 had less than three years of teaching experience. Sixteen teachers had more that 15 years, while the group of vital, relatively young, and yet, experienced teachers (3-15 years) shrank the most: only 7 teachers. The latter group is the most vital force in school reform. With instances of teachers leaving during the school year, long-term illness and teachers' daily tardiness and frequent absences, the school administration had a hard time staffing classes on a day-to-day basis during the 1999/2000 school year.

Although various reasons such as teachers' retirement and illness, administrative transfers, changes in the student population, and burnout contributed to the escalated teacher turnover, several interviewees mentioned that the reconstitution-eligible status of the school was also an important factor influencing teachers' decision to leave the school. Survey respondents were in agreement with the interviewees. More than half of all survey respondents reported that they were thinking of leaving, or had already decided to leave the school. The majority of those agreed that "increased pressure because of the reconstitution-eligible status of the school," along with "better career options" and "higher pay elsewhere," were the three most important reasons for their decision to leave School G. In interviews, teachers and administrators most frequently blamed poor academic preparation and undisciplined students for the school's low academic performance and named students as a major source of their frustration in the school, yet only two survey respondents found "the students here wear me down" as an important reason for their decision to leave the school. Despite their dissatisfaction, some teachers did not plan to leave education, and sought to continue with their careers, though not necessarily in School G. One of the veteran teachers explained:

> I like what I do. Because I like children, I like teaching. It's not for the money because I could think of other places I could be... I just like what I do. I enjoy it. It's tough. But the rewards, see I'm based on future rewards that some day these kids are going to find me walking down the mall and not being able to see very well, probably no teeth in my face but they're going to see, they're going to come up and tap me and say, "Do you remember me?" And I'm going to vaguely look at them and try. And I'm going to say, "What are you doing with your life?" "Oh, I'm a doctor or I'm a truck driver, I'm something." And I'll say, "Oh yes, I had a little piece of that." I had a little hand in shaping that. So, I guess that's really, that's the only reward you get. (G-5)

While internal motivation is an important factor of teaching, they are not the only element guiding people's lives. External motivation and rewards, such as school climate, a short commute, appreciation of their work, and money are equally important. When teachers leave a school, they usually have a good reason. School G lost many teachers since the mid-1990s, but the teacher turnover escalated after the school was placed on probation in January 1998. Almost half of the teachers left in 1998 and 1999, among them many experienced mid-career teachers. Novices tended to stay for a year or two and then moved on. In interviews, there was little trace of commitment to the school. In fact, it seems reconstitution policies and practices did not have a positive effect on teachers' commitment. A few veteran teachers expressed that low commitment of teachers in the school was certainly the main obstacle to turning school performance around.

Teachers' motivation is also reflected in their tardiness and high rate of absenteeism. Teachers' attendance dropped slightly from 96.2 percent in 1998/99 to 95.8 percent in 1999/2000. In early spring 2000, the principal reported that some teachers were constantly late for school. As the school administration had problems providing substitute teachers, this presented an additional burden to the teachers who came to work regularly. On two visits to the school made in late May 2000 (after the MSPAP), several faculty members were absent for one reason or another. As a result, the school's main focus was on keeping the school calm and running rather than on instruction.

Teachers' and Administrators' Attitudes toward Probation: Awareness and Initial Reaction

In January 1998, School G was identified as reconstitution-eligible and was added to an existing group of low performing elementary and middle schools in the district's public system. All the teachers and administrators interviewed were aware of the reconstitution-eligible status of their school. In the spring of 1998, they learned about the school's probation status from multiple sources: their team leaders/department heads, the principal, the media, and by word of mouth. One teacher noted the constant pounding of the school's new status: "We were given an explanation when we were announced. We were given an explanation when we had the new staff come in. It's always in the background, so that kind of shades everything that is said" (G-12).

The fact that everybody was informed about the status did not necessarily mean that everybody also understood what it meant for the school. This became evident in the survey conducted during the 1998/99 school year when over half the respondents reported either having only a vague idea about reconstitution-eligibility or not understanding what it meant for the school at all.

Teachers' initial reaction to reconstitution differed with their length of service at the school and their role at the school (teachers versus administrators). Although the majority of the veteran teachers did not feel good about the label, none was surprised about it. They had seen the school changing over time. A veteran teacher with 17 years invested in School G explained, "It wasn't something that one year was fine and the next year was not. It has been a steady change and I would say over the last eight years, we've really seen a decline"(G-14). Another veteran teacher pondered, "…I would say within the past three years I recognized the decline.... It hit hard three years ago" (G-12).

Almost all the interviewees, regardless of their position in the school or length of teaching experience, felt strongly that labeling the school was not fair. Several teachers emphasized that labeling the school without looking at the causes for declining school performance on the one hand, and not providing resources to improve the situation on the other, was not right. Some veteran teachers were critical about the criteria for inclusion of the school in the reconstitution list. Regarding this fact, a one veteran teacher commented:

> Well, I don't think it's really fair. School G had an illustrious history of reputation of being a very good, top notch school. I just don't understand how the educational system of Maryland, can say because this is what happened on this

> [test], not looking at all the other circumstances as to why, how you're going to just throw something out after the history and you're going to just say, "Oh, this is it... Your school is down for the count because the scores, the MSPAP scores came in this way." I mean, there should be other criteria that you can use. (G-5)

A few teachers said that by labeling more than half of the district's public schools as reconstitution-eligible, the state showed its insensitivity to poor children and questioned the real intention of the state policies. Regarding their personal experience with the school, they stated that they had been doing the best they could with the student population they had and that low test performance was not a reflection of their ability to teach. One teacher said: "My school is recon. I am not. The school is recon. The children are not." (G-6) This position was also strongly echoed in the survey, where the majority of respondents (88 percent) agreed with the statement that they worked to the best of their abilities and effort despite the low test scores. Similarly, in interviews, veteran teachers expressed a strong sense of professional competence. Not a single experienced teacher questioned her/his teaching strategies, although several teachers expressed that they needed help in handling discipline problems and stress management. It was repeatedly emphasized that they could not be the only ones held accountable for the students' achievement. Low academic abilities and poor social skills of the transient student body and disengaged parents on the one hand, and poor working conditions (i.e. over crowdedness in the school, too many students per class, old textbooks and curriculum not aligned with the MSPA tests, insufficient teaching materials, and high teacher turnover) on the other, were most often mentioned as culprits for the school's problems.

Reactions of the newer teachers were more neutral. They distanced themselves from the previous school performance believing that they had not been a part of the problem, and saw themselves only as part of the possible solution. That was especially true for the few teachers who came to School G from other professions. For example, a second year provisional teacher who changed her profession said: "Well, there was no reaction… anything that benefits students… I trusted the state; they have looked into it and felt that we needed to be reconstituted, then… I'm in agreement with it"(G-11). However, there were a few teachers who were glad that the school was identified as reconstitution-eligible. They saw conditions at the school as chaotic and not conducive to learning. They hoped for changes in management of the school but, so far, they had been disappointed. An experienced teacher said that nothing much had happened the first year following reconstitution eligibility (1998/99) and commented: "I expected the bar to be raised both for the teachers and for administrators. I just don't have a sense it was raised for administrators" (G-1).

The administrators also felt that labeling the school wasn't fair but, at the same time, saw the new status of the school as warranted. Along with a few veteran teachers, they questioned how it was possible for the school to be put on probation with its MSPAP composite index much above the mean of the district's public school system and MFT reading score above the state satisfactory standard. The principal, in particular, was unhappy about the label, saying "...the students here stand toe to toe in terms of performance with any other student in the [district]..."(G-4). Being ambivalent about identification of her school as reconstitution-eligible, the principal continued: "I don't like the label. I don't think anybody likes labels, but it's good in the sense that it does help us to make people be aware that things are happening out there and we have to be a part of it" (G-4).

Interestingly, the principal ascribed the 1997 decline on the MSPAP tests to a few specifics at the school. Her explanation was much at odds with the more general and broad reasons reported by teachers and other professionals. The principal attributed low test scores to the absence of two eighth grade teachers during the 1996/97 school year, insufficient teacher training in the use of performance-based instruction, and too little focus on the MSPAP test under the previous principal. Hence, she immediately began organizing teachers' training about different instructional strategies and hoped that results would be seen in 1998.

Several teachers accepted the reconstitution-eligible status as a blessing in disguise because they hoped that they would receive more resources for the school. One teacher explained: "I'm hoping that we might be maybe a recipient of various programs or various resources that would help us to move our school program forward"(G-3). However, their hopes for more resources were dashed as indicated by the following interviewee: "But we were told we had to do better with what we had, because we weren't going to get additional funding. We weren't going to get additional staff. We weren't going to get special equipment. We weren't going to get special resources"(G-12). While two additional teachers (a reading and a math teacher) were hired from resources obtained as a result of the school's reconstitution status, no other resources were made available to the school. The school struggled continuously for resources and was forced to juggle decisions as to where spend available money. Besides the two new teachers acquired for the 1998/99 school year, most of the school's money was spent on teachers' in-service training and printed material.

Teachers' Views on the Maryland Accountability System

The administrators and teachers regarded declining MSPAP test scores as the main reason for their school's reconstitution-eligible status. Every interviewee was of the opinion that improving the MSPAP test results was the main focus of the school. If they wanted to get off the recon list, the students' performance on the MSPAP had to improve. Therefore, almost everything that was done at the school was directed toward the MSPAP. Two teachers' comments provide a sense of the school's MSPAP focus. One teacher noted: "Well, performance tests all the time. We try to do at least one performance test a week" (G-14). According to another: "We are told about MSPAP all the time" (G-21). The teachers commented that the school administration as well as district and state monitors checked to make sure that teachers complied with mandates such as writing lesson plans and displaying the MSPAP words and learning objectives in the classroom. However, the majority of teachers mentioned that they saw supervision as purely an administrative check up which had little to do with the quality of instruction. As a matter of survival, teachers, even those who did not accept legitimacy of the MSPAP, complied with the MSPAP strategies mandated by the school. A first-year teacher said: "Many things that I do in the classroom are geared toward the MSPAP. I do not necessarily agree with that but I do work toward that…" (G-2). A veteran teacher further elaborated: "...so there are certain things we have to have posted…. That's not something I would normally have. The whole area is there because that's mandated…. And see, somebody will come in, and check it off the list… " (G-12).

Despite misgiving about fairness and accuracy of the MSPAP tests as a major instrument to measure school success, several teachers and administrators believed that the MSPAP tests were here to stay. Having lamented the state's evaluation process, teachers stressed that a more qualitative approach to assessing school success was needed. This view corresponds with the survey responses – almost two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that the quality of the school should not be based on quantitative test scores and rates but on more holistic evaluation by inspectors who know the school well.

A large disparity in teachers' opinion about the MSPAP tests itself was evident in the interviews. On the one hand, some teachers saw the benefits of the MSPAP test and performance-based instruction that the MSPAP calls for. Math teachers seemed to value the MSPAP format more than others, as one teacher explained: "Communicating mathematics is directly in line with MSPAP, it's getting [students] to see and to write and to use more thinking skills instead of just computing" (G-20). Another math teacher, piloting a new math textbook, was excited about the district's possible future curriculum, textbook, and available hands-on material for students. She believed that the new math program was aligned with the MSPAP requirements. If adopted, she was convinced that it would be a big help for teachers in preparing students for the MSPAP. An English teacher, who tried to incorporate performance-based instruction in her reading class, said: "I would say at this point we're trying to bring in the thinking because the thinking is required for MSPAP and then maybe starting with an activity that doesn't require as much reading" (G-19). On the other hand, some teachers, both new and experienced, said that they did not understand the intentions of the test and admitted that they hadn't bought into the MSPAP. Nevertheless they considered themselves good teachers.

A large part of teachers' attitudes toward the test could be explained by insufficient knowledge about the test, and more generally, about the value of performance-based instruction for students' understanding of curricular material. Those teachers perceived the MSPAP tests as one more measuring tool with no apparent benefits to students. The following teacher's statement supports this observation: "And it might be because I truly don't have a grasp of what performance-based assessment is or performance-based education is or how I'm supposed to do it. I know about modeling and I know the Dimensions of Learning and Bloom's taxonomy and all that other stuff" (G-18). It seems that the goals behind the MSPAP were not well understood, and as a consequence, not accepted. Teachers' beliefs can be briefly summarized as following:

- It does not make sense to change the three-year curriculum and instruction for one week of tests.
- The MSPAP is not aligned with the students' needs in high school and their teaching goes beyond the scope of the MSPAP.
- The MSPAP is not suitable for students in urban, transient schools with a heavy educational load.

Even teachers who held sympathetic views of MSPAP and saw its benefits voiced various concerns about it. A few teachers perceived the MSPAP tests as subjective group tests whose results depended on the "grader" and his/her grading load. Several others criticized the timing of the MSPAP testing in May as inappropriate. They argued that having eighth graders who are leaving the school take the tests in mid-May, does not allow time for feedback to the group that took the test. A few teachers suggested that a change in the timing of the MSPAP could enhance the tests' educational role.

Many teachers expressed resentment that the MSPAP test scores did not have consequences for individual students while the test scores were used to evaluate their job performance. On the latter point, there was high agreement with the majority of survey respondents (82 percent) agreeing with the statement that they resented being judged on the performance of other teachers on the basis of school-wide test scores. Several teachers expressed that the MSPAP test results needed to, at least, be broken down into groups, if not for individual students. Individual feedback would get students motivated to perform, especially if consequences were attached for them. In addition, teachers noted that they could modify instruction for the tested group, not for next year's students that may be very different. Teachers reported that students were not truly motivated to come to the school on the test day, or to perform successfully. Limited contacts with students attested to the teachers' observation.

In connection with the MSPAP, teachers talked a lot about accountability in the school. They suggested that accountability for the test results was not shared among all the stakeholders involved and that the teachers were overwhelmingly blamed for low test results. Teachers reported that students were not truly motivated to come to the school on the test day, or to perform successfully. Ten days after the MSPAP, a member of the research team talked briefly to a group of three eighth graders. Asked how the MSPAP testing went, they responded: "Yeah, it's over. We don't know how we did, but it wasn't difficult. And we really don't care. It's over. It's grading the teachers and the school, not us."

Some teachers believed that they needed to focus their instruction on the Maryland Functional Tests, which they believed were focused on basic and more useful skill for students' success in high school. In fact, the new principal, who came to School G in the summer of 1999, requested that teachers renew their attention to the MFTs because the school's students were scoring below the state standard (see Table 2). A teacher, explaining why she was focusing on the MFTs and not on MSPAP in her class, said:

> Functional math. They get direct results from the functional math so they really feel that this is something that really relates to us. They get really revved up about it because they get their scores back, their individual scores back and all. MSPAP cannot really make that connection. They feel that "Oh, that's grading you."(G-20)

Most of the teachers perceived a great deal of pressure created from the administration and the state with the MSPAP. While the MSPAP strategies (MSPAP Fridays, MSPAP words, lesson plans) were obligatory for everyone to follow, teachers reported that for most these strategies were not really part of the classroom instruction. Regardless of their opinion about the

MSPAP tests, several teachers expressed that it was important for the school that the students do well on the tests.

When discussing MSPAP, the teachers raised the issue of the purpose of accountability. Although they did not reject the need for accountability in general, they stated that at present, accountability was nothing more than an enormous quantity of paperwork generated by the state policies, and certainly exacerbated by the school's probationary status. An experienced teacher tried to explain his position in the following way: "... teaching is an art . . . you take the best of what you got and you try and get the kids fired up. So it's not about paperwork, it's about leadership and accountability and I don't see leadership being held accountable" (G-1). Many teachers viewed accountability as a bureaucratic approach that unnecessarily consumed teachers' energy which could be better spent on planning, instruction, and work with individual students. The following description of accountability offered by a teacher, said it all:

> Accountability manifests itself in more paperwork. More paperwork. The more paperwork you have, the less organization you have. I mean for some reason, whoever thought that more paperwork leads to more organization, it does not. The more paperwork you have, the less organized you are. The simpler things are, the more organized things are. And then we have to document everything that we do. Nobody ever reads the documentation. I mean, who can read all that paperwork, you know. But we have to document this, we have to document that... We spend so much time documenting that now time is taken away from my lesson plan... I don't see any real intervention going on in order to help the student... (G-21)

Almost every interviewee believed that the Maryland accountability system needed to be changed. The majority of survey respondents also shared this view, with just 25 percent believing that the state's accountability system should remain as it was.

Collegiality

The veteran teachers talked about a strong collegial atmosphere in School G, where the faculty and students were referred to as a family. Cooperation among teachers was fostered by the open classroom space and, especially, by the success of the students. As the student population changed, the school's working conditions and climate worsened. After the retirement of the veteran principal in the summer of 1997, the new principal wanted to establish a more business-like atmosphere in the school. According to the teachers, "the family" metaphor was replaced by talk of faculty and students. Collegial cooperation was replaced by hierarchal top-down organization with an emphasis on strong middle management.

Serious discipline problems and high student and teacher mobility became the main characteristics of the school climate, which teachers believed did not offer the conditions necessary for nurturing personal and working relationship. The declining MSPAP test scores and pressure to improve school performance, particularly after the school was placed on probation in January 1998, further deteriorated the climate at School G. According to teachers, the reconstitution-eligible status of the school neither fostered a sense of collegiality in the school nor did it bring faculty together. The survey respondents also expressed the perception that the reconstitution status of the school did not have positive effects on the faculty and collegiality. Only three respondents perceived the reconstitution-eligible status of the school as a positive force in bringing faculty together.

Those teachers interviewed, veterans and novices alike, reported they felt overwhelmed and burned out by work. Veteran teachers reported not having time to perform their other roles (i.e.. serving as department head/team leaders) and that they could not offer support to each other or to many new teachers. Most teachers' interactions with their colleagues took place on teams:

in 1998/99 teams were organized by subjects, in 1999/2000 by grades. They were supposed to meet three times a week to plan and discuss classroom instruction and students' discipline problems, which impacted their learning. The teachers felt that team meetings were useful and needed, although many times not productive. Since they were faced with so many students' problems, instruction was frequently pushed to the back of the burner as teachers used this time "to unload" and "to commiserate." Although the teachers welcomed collegial meetings, they also expressed concern that these meetings took time away from their preparation for instruction. Often they were forced to do planning and preparation for classes at home in the evening.

However, team meetings did not always take place as teachers often had other things to deal with during allocated planning time. For example, during the 1999/2000 school year, School G placed a strong emphasis on parental involvement in student discipline and their academic success. Therefore, teachers often used up planning time for meetings with the parents of children who needed special attention.

Collegial conditions were especially tough for many new teachers in the school as they received little or no support from their older and more experienced colleagues. Also hindering meaningful collegial interactions was the fact that very few veteran teachers remained at the school. Those who remained thought that there was not enough time to even get acquainted with the new people, let alone to act as their mentors. Asked about having collegial support or mentors, a new teacher said:

> No, not really. There's no formal system of mentoring. There is very little mentorship. We had a very good department head. She did the best she could... My department head was teaching classes. She didn't have time to really come around and observe like she was supposed to. She had to check all of our folders, I mean like a hundred and fifty folders for like six or seven teachers to make sure that they're on task as far as the forms are concerned. (G-21)

New, first time teachers expressed that they would appreciate more support for their work and that they would like to have a more collegial atmosphere. At the same time, the new teachers described their veteran mentors as hard working teachers who stayed in school long hours and were very devoted. Mentors were on the same schedule as mentees and therefore they could not observe each other classes even if they had wanted to do so.

Beside instructional support, the new, first time teachers also need emotional support. This is especially important in the schools with heavy educational loads and difficult working conditions. One of the team leaders expressed her thought about new teachers in the following passage:

> The majority of them I see as individuals who need a support base. I think they need comforting, they need to know that just as the students, they can also do well. So I also feel that there has to be something in place, I guess to address the feelings of staff members who come into a new school, a new school system and also coming into teaching which can be quite challenging. (G-3)

Leadership

A principal is looked upon as the key factor in the success of the school and is therefore closely watched by the central office. Since being identified as reconstitution-eligible in January 1998, School G has had two principals: the first remained on the job for two years (1997 to 1999) and the second entered the school in the summer of 1999. Although there were major differences in what was accomplished in each "reconstitution" school year under the two principals in terms of changing the school and ultimately in the MSPAP test scores, both employed a top down managerial approach to change in trying to implement the states mandates in the school.

The First Principal

Having taken over from the veteran principal, who retired in the summer of 1997, Ms. X was not new to School G, as she had been a vice-principal for two years. Being well liked among the teachers, they lobbied for her to get the vacant principal position. In her prior 25 years of employment in the district's public school system, Ms. X had taught English, served as a department head, and also worked extensively as an administrator in the capacities of assistant to a vice-principal, acting vice-principal, and vice-principal.

When she assumed the principalship, School G was in flux. The student body was becoming needier and less prepared for academic challenges. The school building was overcrowded and in need of repair. Discipline problems had become a serious obstacle to student learning and non-graded curriculum no longer seemed to work. Although the displeased faculty was looking for new leadership, they had a hard time adjusting to the school's changing conditions and resisted instructional change from outside. The new principal was aware of the many challenges in front of her with regard to changing the trend of declining school climate and academic performance.

Only a half year into her principalship (January 1998), Ms. X was informed that School G would be put on probation. She wasn't happy about the label, but she stressed that under her leadership School G had already began to implement activities aimed at increasing the school MSPAP performance such as intensive staff development focusing on performance based activities, Dimensions of Learning, and preparation for the MSPAP (i.e. mock testing sessions and MSPAP words of the week) before having been identified as a reconstitution-eligible school. She hoped that the results of these activities would be manifested in the school's 1998 MSPAP scores. She was certain that the school would get off the probation list within the year because of the school's good performance history.

As soon as the probationary status of the school was announced, she organized a team of people who worked on writing a new School Improvement Plan in spring of 1998. According to a few teachers, the principal was totally consumed by this process and the school climate actually began to deteriorate even further during that time.

Besides writing the new SIP, the principal immediately focused on improving students' writing skills, and asked the English department head to prepare a program for teaching writing across the curriculum. This program was introduced in a staff development meeting in the late spring of 1998, and all teachers attended three workshops to familiarize themselves with the new strategy. The basic idea was that students write within every course regardless of its subject mater. Interviewed teachers spoke about writing across the curriculum as one area where the school had consistently sought to improve test scores since 1998:

> Making sure that there's an influx of writing, although they [students] say, 'Ms. ... this is not English.' But right up there they have an assignment. They have to write a letter, which talks about the linoleum-printing project, you know, explain it. That's definitely influx. That's definitely a part of, we're English teachers this year [1998/99], as well as our own particular area... you know, we are now English teachers. (G-12)

Writing was encouraged everywhere. Even students sent to the office as a result of discipline problems had to explain in writing what they had done and why they came to the office. English teachers began to create a writing portfolio for each student, which was supposed to be checked by the English department head. Teachers were monitored to make sure that they used writing in their classrooms.

As her predecessor had done nothing with the MSPAP, Ms. X informed teachers about the importance of the MSPAP and urged them to use performance-based activities in the classes. She said that it was a difficult task much like "teaching old dogs new tricks" but she felt she had succeeded: "Initially, like anything else, people do not like the change, and you have to get them into the mode where they will change. And now, they have changed" (G-4).

The principal along with two vice principals and a data manager created a top-down managerial approach. The middle management team was comprised of department heads and a few support people (such as the middle school liaison and the MSPAP coordinator) who brought most news and decisions to "the people in trenches." The description of the majority of her colleagues fit what the principal had to say about her own work:

> I meet with teams once in a while... the middle management people are my department heads. And I give them instruction in terms of what I see as a vision, and then I get them to the point where they truly understand what it is that needs to be done. And then I get them out there and let them start echoing the same things that I'm saying. So, the teachers don't think it is my thing... I don't always go out there and force it. I get other people.... And by doing that you get the job done. (G-4)

Among most teachers, initial support for her had already vanished by the spring of 1998. Almost all interviewed teachers voiced strong criticism of her leadership and reported that she had changed beyond their understanding. A veteran teacher articulated her observations about the principal in the following statement:

> It's almost a paranoia thing. She was our assistant principal. We petitioned to get her here and she came back a different person. It was almost us versus them mentality. And it got to the point where in her first year where she had one hundred percent [support], and by June, I would say, ninety-eight point nine percent of the faculty and staff were against her in one year's time. You have teachers who have left, left and right, the old guard so to speak who either transferred to other schools, put in for transfers, or retired early because things have just gotten to the point where you feel like your voice is not welcomed. Any criticism, whether it's a valid one or not, is just not welcomed. (G-18)

Several teachers described her as an authoritarian figure who showed little respect for them and who provided little support for their problems in the classroom. Teachers reported that she was difficult to reach and that she ran the School G from her office, surrounded by a small group of people who disseminated her ideas. The teachers got most of their information about the school's reconstitution-eligible status and new policies from their team leaders and/or written material. Even a second year teacher, who did not see the principal leadership as questionable, described her leadership style as a top-down affair, as "a pyramid of facts it starts with the principal, then department heads, then keeps going down to us..." (G-11). A new, first year teacher was extremely critical about the school administration, saying that the gap between the faculty and the administration had grown wider. He observed that low morale among hard working teachers posed as a real threat to the well being of the school community and concluded that, "the adversarial relationship between the faculty and administration has to stop" (G-2).

Based on these teacher reports, it appears that the principal was out of touch with her own staff without realizing it. She though she was effective while she was not. Several teachers were disappointed with her, left feeling patronized and not considered as professionals by her approach. They believed that they did not get any help from the administration with the problems they faced in the classroom, particularly discipline. A first year teacher said: "I don't think there's a lot of support, in fact I don't think there's any support" (G-2). Teachers believed that they were forced to deal with problems on their own. That was especially true for new teachers with large classes and some very undisciplined students. When asked what additional resources would assist her in meeting the school's goal, a new teachers said: "Well, what I'd like is that the principal sits down and has a conference with teachers . . . No physical material, but just having the support" (G-11).

However, a few teachers thought that the district held the principal responsible for everything that was happening at the school, and that she was under a lot of pressure from outside. One teacher explained: "In the beginning of the year she was out in the halls and everything, but now she is busy with paperwork, and you know, other problems, like defending her teachers. She is a nice person but has not been very nice on the job because of the pressure" (G-6).

Frustrated and probably afraid of consequences if their criticism in the interviews was revealed, some teachers were very careful as to how they worded their criticism about the principal. In fact, two teachers did not want to talk about the school leadership on the record. One of the teachers expressed his frustration with the following statement: "I have not seen any changes in leadership or management of this building. I have not seen changes in the disciplinary system in this building… I have seen a lot of dog and pony shows about instruction… I hope the school is taken over" (G-1).

School leadership is responsible for organizing sustainable communication, training teachers, and pacing major changes in the school. When the new principal brought new programs and strategies to the school, many of them required by the central office, she tried to implement them by talking to teachers, mostly through her middle management people. Several teachers felt overburdened and overwhelmed by information and the many changes that were supposed to happen at the school. Some veteran teachers and novices alike had a difficult time dealing with all of the changes for variety of reasons. They felt overwhelmed by multilevel change brought to them through huge amounts of written materials or spoken words at the meetings. A second year teacher said: "We receive a lot of information. On paper! I am overwhelmed ... We have so many notebooks, and binders and memos. ... I can't process it" (G-11). A veteran teacher expressed very similar sentiment, saying:

> It's too much. It's overload. I know a lot of young teachers say that. You know, "make sure you read that book and the information in that, because that's going to be next"...you know, you go to team meetings... check and see such and such day, because, you know, what's going on... oh yeah, we got so much stuff, I don't even know what they're saying. And that's, you know, source overload.... (G-12)

When asked in what form the information gets to them, the same teacher answered:

> Written. We have a weekly bulletin. Read that. Because if you don't read that, you gonna miss something. There's a Thursday bulletin that is like a teacher to a teacher, and that one is reminder. That trip is going on, that person's coming in... That needs to be turned in, and stuff like that. Written. There is, when there's special things going on, we have testing... then we'll have a faculty meeting, or special team meetings, like every month we have a team meeting with the principal... (G-12)

New teachers, many of whom came to the school without professional preparation (i.e. through Teach for America), suffered the most. They complained that they were stressed out. One mentor described their stress as "...beyond belief... to the point of tears and being consoled.... I really feel for them" (G-14). When asked where all this information and change was coming from, a new teacher said: "Coming from the state, and then the information that's passed on from the state, the principal puts it in her newsletter, or gives information, or tells us verbally in our meetings. So, there's, it's coming from all aspects" (G-11). Evidently, some teachers thought that all the pressure was coming from "outside" and that the principal was only the "agent" of the district and state policies that needed to be implemented in the school.

Despite all the plans and many "paper" changes in the school, many teachers thought that not much really had changed in the classrooms or in the school climate. Lesson observations and the survey responses gathered one-and-a-half years into the school's probation status corroborated these teachers' statements. Two-thirds of the respondents agreed with the statement that the school stayed pretty much as it was before probation, and only few respondents agreed that "the spirit of the school has become more optimistic" as a result of reconstitution eligibility.

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Decision Making Process

The Office of Reconstitution-Eligible Schools requested a detailed SIP for the 1998/99 school year. The school improvement team (administrators, teachers, and parents), with substantial help from the central office, prepared a 75-page school improvement plan and submitted it for approval. After several revisions, the SIP was accepted in the late spring of 1998 as the blueprint for the 1998/99 school year. All the interviewees were aware of the SIP. Many commented that while a lot of time was spend writing and planning the SIP and while "it really looked good on paper," not much was really changing in the classroom. Despite being informed about the status of the school as well as the new school improvement plan and its corresponding focus (i.e. to improve the MSPAP test scores and discipline) at the beginning of the 1998/99 school year, some interviewees expressed doubt that all of the new teachers knew much about the school's planned responses to its reconstitution-eligible status.

Reading the voluminous SIP, one gets an impression that it was written more for the outside world and perhaps for the school administration to carry out mandates from the central office. The principal thought the SIP for 1998/99 was an important document, and described it as a "living" document that could be changed as needed. According to her, everybody was mobilized in writing it, and thus she hoped that everyone would "live" by it. Her optimistic claims could not be substantiated either by teachers' accounts or by the survey responses.

While all interviewed teachers were aware of the plan, only a few of them (i.e. team leaders) were part of the group that put it together, a few had read it (at least the sections that referred to their work), and some teachers (veterans and novices) only knew about its content.

This picture corresponds with the survey findings where one-third of the respondents said they were familiar with the SIP in detail, while the rest only knew the sections related to their work or had a slight idea about the plan. A few respondents noted that they did not have time to familiarize themselves with the plan, while the majority of them reported that the SIP was in place in their school. Only three respondents thought it had a strong effect on school improvement.

Regarding the school performance goals, teachers reported that they were not familiar with the exact numbers in the SIP. However, they knew that School G focused on three long-range goals: (1) to raise students' achievement; (2) to improve discipline; and (3) to improve attendance. Several interviewees mentioned that the state's long-term achievement goals for the MSPAP were unrealistic, or "optimistic, very optimistic" for the school's student population. About half of the survey respondents agreed that it was unrealistic to expect schools that serve poor neighborhoods to perform on the same level as schools in wealthy neighborhoods. Some teachers commented that the quarterly milestones and yearly objectives stated in percentages in the SIP were completely arbitrary. Here is an opinion of a highly educated and experienced teacher who was at the school three years: "I am familiar with it [the SIP]. It's a lot of 'let's change the percentages.' Let's increase this, and it is important but it is another example of teaching as a science. If we could kind of modify these numbers things will be better..."(G-1).

However, almost every interviewee was involved in one way or another, with at least one of the committees (achievement, climate, attendance) dealing with school improvement. Survey responses also show a very high involvement of the faculty in the school improvement activities. Yet, some teachers thought that their participation in these committees was ineffective. At meetings, they reported that the same topics were discussed several times, but little had changed in the school. One teacher described her frustration: "I'm on the school climate and discipline committee, and our first meeting was to address what's going on there. We made some recommendations, the same recommendations we've making for the past three years" (G-12). While some teachers felt that they were heard by the school administration, at the same time they thought their suggestions were generally not acted upon. In addition, teachers believed that they were pushed into compliance with outside mandates even if they opposed them.

Some veteran teachers perceived that they were pushed aside in the decision making process, and did not have an opportunity to discuss the SIP before it was approved. When asked if she had access to the SIP, a veteran teacher said: "I think if I asked for it, then I probably could see it. I mean years ago I was on the team but now… and I think if I asked the principal if I could be on it, I would be allowed but I don't have time. There is no time for it"(G-14). The same teacher that cited the lack of time as the reason for not participating in the SIP, immediately continued: "We would like to be a part, teachers would like to be a part in decision making... we don't get that opportunity, unless you're on the school improvement team, we don't hear about too many things"(G-14).

But it was not only the veteran teachers who did not participate in the decision making process. Some new teachers also felt the same way. The perception of many teachers that they were not a part of decision-making process was supported by the survey results. Only 10 percent of the respondents agreed that "the faculty discusses major decisions and see to it that they are carried out."

School G's vision and mission statement, as stated in the SIP, were adopted from the materials generated by both the State Education Department and the district education office. In interviews, there was very little indication that the faculty "personalized" either the school's vision or its mission statement. The only vision the principal expressed was to get the school off the reconstitution list as soon as possible. The preoccupation of the SIP writers was to raise the test scores; the only thing that seemed to matter in evaluating the school. The orientation is also evident in the SIP where four listed goals are followed by several pages of activities and strategies. A reader has no sense of priority tasks and realism in the action plan. For example, in order to raise students' achievement on the MSPAP (the first goal), there are four focus areas (subjects) on which the school should work, along with 47 different activities and strategies which should be carried out during the 1998/99 school year. However, some areas, important for a healthy school climate and a successful learning community, are absent. For example, school climate was addressed only as a discipline problem, while collegiality was not mentioned at all in the SIP.

The principal complained that the content of the SIP was directed from above (the district), and that they were forced to include the outside mandates in order for the SIP to be approved. It seems that the SIP was prepared for the educational authorities above, and not as a blueprint for the school action. Indeed, the SIP almost reads like somebody's wish list with little connection to the real conditions of the school, especially if one compares its content to the ideas expressed by the teachers with regard to their visions for school improvement. Teachers' visions were expressed in the following suggestions:

- To stop adversarial relations between teachers and administrative staff and to develop better communication in the school;
- To improve working conditions at the school: eliminate the open classroom space;
- To change the organization of instruction: abolish cross-graded curriculum and individual schedules, and introduce graded instruction;
- To take into account students' academic and social needs;

- To have smaller classes and more manipulative materials for learning;
- To have fewer disruptions in the school that have nothing to do with teaching and everyday activities in the classrooms;
- To involve parents in students' education;
- To accept a discipline code and strictly enforce it;
- To remove very disruptive students from classrooms;
- To introduce one thing at the time and follow it through;
- To have more time to reflect on what they do in the classroom and time for collegial discussion; and
- To discuss the compatibility of the testing (MSPAP) with students' needs in high school.

In the 1998/99 school year, the principal was swamped by the challenges, which couldn't be overcome by her leadership style. Realizing that she had been losing ground, she became more demanding toward teachers who were already overwhelmed by paperwork and chaotic conditions at the school. Everything needed to be documented in writing. The school was in disarray. The teachers' morale was very low at the end of the school's first post-probationary year. As a result, 16 teachers, almost half of the faculty, left. The school was not taken over by the state as some teachers wished, but the principal was replaced in the summer of 1999.

A New Principal Comes to the School

In the summer of 1999, Ms. Y was assigned to School G as a new principal. With an MA in education, she had been working as a teacher and administrator in the district's elementary and middle schools for more than twenty years. While she knew about the school's reconstitution-eligible status, she was largely unaware of its detailed circumstances until she accepted the job.

According to her, most of these details were unpleasant surprises and Ms. Y said that she had second thoughts about accepting this principalship.

She said she found the school in general disarray. For example, unsecured and confidential student records were found scattered in the teachers' lounge, and new mathematics textbooks along with teaching materials were left unpacked in boxes in the office. Being told about disengaged parents, the principal learned that there might be two sides to the story. In the spring of 1999, the parents picketed the school and demanded that the school be made a safe place for students. Poison ivy and poison oak were growing in the hedge in front of the school and some students had become ill. According to her, parents also complained about the chaos in the non-graded curriculum. The principal reported a moving story of a complaining parent with two children in the school, a bright eighth grader and a sixth grader with severe learning disabilities. This parent noticed that both her children came home with the same homework and discovered that both students were taught the same curriculum pretty much the same way.

Teachers had another story to tell. According to the principal, they were unhappy and saw a need for many changes in the school, particularly in the areas of instruction and discipline. They expressed several concrete ideas about school improvement, including closing the open classroom space, restructuring instructional organization, and suggesting measures to improve the school discipline (i.e. an in-school detention center and a strictly enforced discipline code). They asked the principal to be visible in the school by helping them with daily tasks in the classrooms. Neighbors also complained about the school, mainly about students' behavior, their noise level, and littering the neighborhood.

Half of the faculty had left at the end of the 1998/99 school year, but the ones who came back in the fall were very excited about the change in the school leadership. The teachers reported that she was a good listener, and that she acted upon their advice. According to them, they said they were appreciated and respected. At the same time, they felt invigorated and had high hopes for a positive change in the school as illustrated in the next two teachers' statement: "Before there was no hope for the school;" (G-2) and "After she took over, our expectations were raised high and we hoped for a real change..." (G-17).

The Principal's Goals for the School

The principal's first goal was to take the school off the reconstitution-eligible list, although she admitted that it might take more time than expected by the district and state educational authorities. According to her, the school was not regularly maintained and was in need of serious renovation. She was concerned about the limited resources available to fix everything that needed to be taken care of in an almost 30-year-old building and reported that she had to "constantly juggle" between deciding what deserved priority. In order to get more resources for the school, financial as well as human, she organized several partnerships with the community and local businesses and raised additional resources for the school. Determined to improve the academic, physical, and ultimately the social image of the school, the principal said she would need to tackle these goals simultaneously and creatively due to the severe lack of resources.

After her arrival, the school changed considerably. According to teachers the principal acted quickly in response to parents and teachers complaints and suggestions. Looking at the large range of looming problems, she first took care of the relatively simple tasks to improve the school's physical infrastructure to make it more conducive to learning. Old bushes, poison ivy, and oak were removed from the front lawn, which was landscaped anew. New semi-closed classrooms were built in the much disputed open classroom space, which, according to those interviewed, had been an important obstacle to creating a calmer and quieter atmosphere in the school. However, due to a lack of money, the project has been not completely finished. Although the student enrollment was down by another five percent in 1999/2000, the school was still overcrowded. To alleviate the overcrowding the school, another portable was added in the school's backyard to accommodate an in-house detention center and another classroom for 1999/2000. Many things, both major and minor, needed to be fixed. However, the crumbling, 27-year-old mobile unit, which housed the eighth grade team, was the principal's next top priority.

During the 1999/2000 school year, the older, run-down portable served as the homeroom for the eighth grade team which consisted of over 200 students. Its open space was divided by furniture into four classrooms where the core subjects (English language, social studies, math, and science) were taught. In March of 2000, two members of the research team visited the school and spent some time in the old portable. A journal entry of a research team member visiting the school on that day reads as follows:

> For few minutes I stayed in math class, but only peeked into the other two classrooms - in one, students watched a TV program, in the other, they were doing individual writing assignments. Every classroom was packed with desks and students, especially the math class. There was no room to move around. For 200 students in such a small place it was remarkably quite. I mostly sat in the social studies class where a young teacher energetically spoke about the suffrage movement in the United States and tried to engage the students in discussion. He was very clear about the homework assignment and rubric. Few students participated in the discussion, mostly the ones who were asked by the teacher. Some students were doing other things and a couple of them were half-lying on their desks, not quite present. Despite the doors to the portable being wide open, the air felt thick. During the class, I struggled, first, with yawning, and then with coughing. I had hard time breathing and felt hot. I could not wait to leave the portable. After the class, I talked to one of the students, who had been half asleep while I was in the class. She told me she had asthma and that she was often sick in the school. It did not appear to me as an excuse. Later that day, I spoke to the principal and told her about my experience. She was well aware of the portable's conditions, and also mentioned that at the beginning of the school year the old

> portable's carpet had not been cleaned as it could disintegrate with cleaning. There was no money to get a new one..."

To several teachers' relief, the new principal created an in-house detention center "The Eagle's Nest Behavioral Adjustment Center" in the new portable. Some teachers stressed that discipline was definitely much better than in previous years and praised the new in-house center. Its intention was to keep misbehaving students in the school while at the same time maintaining a working atmosphere in classrooms for the rest of students. An excerpt from a researcher's journal reads:

> When I visited the Eagle's Nest, six students were working on their assignments, one at the time consulting with a teacher. A large, well-lit room, with only tiny windows under the ceiling, occupies more than half of the portable. Simply furnished, air conditioned room, with desk and chairs, is decorated with yellow and black posters with slogans such as: Welcome to Success; Positive People Get Positive Responses; Positive Actions Bring Positive Results, etc. Besides small individual desks and chairs for up to 12 students who are on short-time detentions, there is also a desk for a teacher, a bookshelf with books and magazines, a TV, and some other AV equipment. After a while a student put down his work, took a magazine from a bookshelf and read. The room felt spacious, quiet and cool, the atmosphere working. It felt like an oasis of peace in the school.
>
> Before I left, a kind and soft-spoken ex-science teacher told me that students stayed in the center up to three days. They did their homework and special assignments with which he was able to help. Besides helping with homework, the teacher also did counseling. Most of these students, he reported, needed help with anger diffusion and he encouraged reflection on the incidents, which brought them in the center. According to the teacher, about 80% of the students did not return, and yet there have been some cases when students asked teachers to be sent to the center. I wasn't surprised that students want to come to "an oasis of piece.

While the school was a quieter place than a year before, teachers and the principal said that there were still too many discipline problems. A full-time policewoman, employed at the school and a part-time probation officer working at thee school reported that the nature of discipline problems were not as serious as in other schools. "Only minor stuff, although one needs to be constantly vigilant," said the policewoman. However, in informal interviews, a few teachers said that there were still not enough adults who were engaged in the teaching and learning process with students. According to them, the classes were still too large and the new discipline code was not systematically enforced. Single- file lines to the cafeteria or auditorium with adults often screaming at students makes one feel like as if they are in a factory-prison like atmosphere. Instead of having more teachers to be able to improve the school performance, teachers and the principal reported that they lost two teaching positions due to the declining number of students.

The new principal began the 1999/2000 school year with sweeping changes in the organization of instruction. The old non-graded organization, previously tinkered with in 1997, was completely abolished. Thus, instruction was organized in three grade teams (sixth, seventh, and eighth) that were physically located in different areas of the school. Each team comprised of approximately 200 students was broken into smaller groups (four to six) where students were mostly heterogeneously grouped. However, students with severe learning disabilities were still kept in small groups for instruction, and about 10 percent of the students were also separated into advanced academic programs on the basis of student language abilities. Large groups of students in the classroom with teachers lecturing, or students silently working on written assignment, were commonly observed during the visits.

While the new principal continued with the existing programs and strategies such as writing across the curriculum, basic study skills course for sixth graders, and several MSPAP strategies (i.e. MSPAP Fridays, benchmark testing, making sure of the use of rubrics and MSPAP words, and lesson plans) in 1998/99, she focused on improving the students' alarmingly low reading scores. Two reading teachers were hired and a specialist from the local university was in the school on a regular basis to instruct teachers on strategies for teaching reading. The school also changed the reading instruction material. Soar to Success was adopted in addition to the McDougal Littel Language of Literature Series.

In her actions, the principal was assisted by one vice principal (two in 1998/99), and a team of nine full-time team of and four part-time support people and professionals. She eliminated all the non-classroom positions such as specialists and department heads, so all faculty members taught classes. The principal reported that she had a strong support from the local school system in several ways. For example, the school improvement team attended the Ten Step School Improvement Process workshop offered by the district. Especially welcome was the district's direct help in the school, first, in the form of the assistance provided by the instructional specialists who were very helpful to new teachers, and second, by providing additional teaching staff when some teachers left during the school year. However, problems remained and the principal had problems keeping classes staffed due to a variety of reasons, including teachers' illness, poor attendance rates, and mid-year teacher departures. During the 1999/2000 school year six teachers left. The principal was aware of teachers' poor motivation and their low level of commitment to the school.

Professional Development for New Teachers

In the fall of 1999, the principal spent every morning observing teachers delivering instruction. She observed almost all teachers (34 of 39) and according to her perception only 11 had "sound instructional program." This was not surprising, as there were 16 new, mostly first time teachers in the school, some of whom came to the school from other professions. Very little cooperative learning, hands on activities, problem solving, or use of rubrics was observed. Several teachers were placed in the performance improvement plan that the principal instituted and received additional supervision and help from the local school system's instructional specialists (reading and social science) who also helped new teachers at School G. According to the principal, there was an urgent need for teacher professional development, one of her priority tasks. In addition to informing teachers about possibilities for professional development (such as courses at the university level and those organized by the local educational establishment), the principal tried to involve teachers in various training during the school year and also encouraged teachers to enroll in relevant summer courses. In response, seven teachers started taking part in a reading course for credit that was offered at the school by the local university.

School G had a large number of special education students. To help with these particularly challenged students, the principal was instrumental in forming a partnership with the local university and with an institution that deals with the education of physically and emotionally handicapped children to offer a course in the summer 2000 that was suitable not only for special education teachers, but also for teachers who deal with socially and academically deprived students in general.

The principal also encouraged teachers to apply for several available grants for their professional development either through local universities or the professional development program provided by the local school district. She said that she had told to new provisional teachers as well as the veterans who had been evaluated as "not successful" that they would have to obtain professional certificates. If they did not take advantage of the grants now, they would have to pay for the education themselves later if they wanted to stay in the school.

Initial Enthusiasm for the New Principal Declines

Before teachers at School G complained that the ex-principal was not seen, now there was a feeling among teachers that there was too much of "the principal" everywhere. When some teachers were approached towards the end of the school years, and asked how the school changed under the new leadership, they did not want to elaborate on changes. At first, a slightly hesitant response was: "Not much, it is pretty much the same, no major changes, no difference. We continued with writing across curriculum and much emphasis is placed on reading. Focus on the MSPAP is stronger than ever before." When probed deeper, teachers reported several specific changes. Three math teachers were excited about the summer 1999 training sessions on the new curriculum and math textbook. The new curriculum, aligned with the MSAP, gave them optimism that the MSPAP test scores would increase this year. However, at the same time one teacher expressed that this year she had more challenges in the class because her groups were all heterogeneous. Before they were grouped according to their ability. This year the students were grouped more heterogeneously, and only about 10 percent were placed in Advanced Academic Team based on language performance.

Others felt good the about in-house detention center and the constant attention to cooperate more with parents. Parent-teacher conferences for students with problems were taking place regularly and teachers felt that there were some results. At the same time, they expressed concern that their planning time is used for this purpose, which left them very little time to plan for instruction in school and that large part of their preparation needed to be done at home.

While reporting on many positive changes in the school, teachers had different opinion about the direction the new principal followed. While some thought that there were not enough radical changes introduced in the school to really change the school performance, some others simply stated that their expectations for the new principal were too high. Taken the challenges at the school, she might just not be able to do all the things in one year. These teachers also wondered aloud if her school policies, which were "100 percent in line with the state mandates," were the proper way to go at School G. Most of them expressed their belief that too much emphasis was being placed on the MSPAP test. "Too much pressure on test scores - everything we do is directed toward rising the test scores. Testing left and right, test score and test scores." Above all, they said the time for MSPAP testing was approaching and "the heat" was on, more than ever.

Although the principal initially listened to teachers, she did not take the same course later in the school year. It appeared that she adhered to a top-down management style and along the way alienated some teachers who were critical of her decisions or simply just expressed different ideas about running the school. One of the few veterans still at the school said:

> We expected too much of her [the principal]. We are disappointed. The test results are the only thing that matters to her. They are important, but there is more to education of inner city students than that. We need to motivate them [students] for learning and connect it to their needs. We feel that no dissent is allowed.

According to some teachers, many colleagues were absent too often so they had to carry their teaching load, and they could not do what they had planned for instruction. In their view, the school was severely understaffed and a few teachers said no attention was being paid to electives that could help with education of underprivileged child. One teacher commented that it was really puzzling to her that a large number of students in classes and a lot of "drill and kill" activities influenced students' discipline. She continued that there were not enough activities (electives) in the school that would lift students' spirit and motivate them to learn. For example, during the 1999/2000 school year, there was just one foreign language teacher and only one PE teacher for 633 early adolescent students bursting with energy and lacking interest in book learning. About 100 students had art class and 60 students were involved in the school's music program. In informal chats, there were other teachers who questioned the principal's strong focus on basics at the school. They said that this approach was a shortsighted strategy, which would result in immediate test scores' improvement but not necessarily in better-equipped and motivated students for learning. They also added that the principal needed to do what the state wanted: produce higher tests scores as soon as possible.

After not having a librarian/media specialist for few years, the principal hired a part-time librarian/media specialist during the 1999/2000 school year. A retired specialist, who joined School G, organized the library and media center in the school, and assisted teachers and students with their needs. She reported that when she arrived at the school, neither teachers nor students came to the library with any frequency, as they were not used to coming to the library. According to her, the situation was changing: more teachers and students came more often to the library/center, requesting help with preparation for classes or just reading. However, the librarian saw a need for a richer book collection and more computers/work stations for students. Above all, she advocated a need for a full-time specialist who could really make a change in the school.

May 2000: The MSPAP Test Scores Rose

Despite many reported improvements, problems at School G still persisted and low teacher morale was looming high in early June. The principal said she worked long hours every day, including weekends. In early June, just a couple of weeks before the end of the school year, a member of the research team saw the principal for a few minutes in her modest office. There was a line of people waiting for her attention. Behind her desk, stacked with papers a foot high, she looked tired, overwhelmed but determined. After a very short conversation, she said: "You know, it was a tough year."

What were the results of the principal's determination to get the school off the reconstitution list? The MSPAP in May 2000 rose considerably, though still far below the state standards. However, the improvements in the 2000 MSPAP test scores can not be sustained with a poorly motivated, poorly educated, and highly mobile teaching staff. The question that remains to be answer is will the leadership have the will and external support over several years to create a healthy, stimulating school climate with a collegial atmosphere that remains open.

Summary

When School G, an overcrowded and rundown middle school located at the edge of a large Maryland city, was placed on the state's probation list in January 1998, both its Maryland Functional and MSPAP test scores exceeded the county average. However, in the year prior to the reconstitution-eligible announcement, its MSPAP composite test score had dropped by six points. In comparison to other reconstitution-eligible schools in the state, School G's predominantly African American student body had a relatively light educational load, with only 40 percent of its students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Nonetheless, teachers attributed the decline in academic performance to an increasingly poor student population. In addition, they also blamed poor student discipline, a school leadership unresponsive to changing school demographics, and state educational policies for the school's placement on probation.

Although generally perceived by most teachers as an unfair measure, School G's reconstitution-eligible status did trigger some school change. The new principal was determined to take the school of the probation list. Indeed, that spring much of her energy was spent on developing a new school improvement plan. However, while her attention was diverted to this endeavor, the school was left to deteriorate. Using a top-down managerial style, she created a middle layer of management and isolated herself from the teachers while simultaneously pushing district-mandated instructional strategies, MSPAP preparation activities, and professional development opportunities, which were derided by some faculty members as nothing more than "dog and pony shows." Though "invisible," the principal alienated the faculty by overwhelming them with reform mandates and paperwork. As a result, an openly adversarial atmosphere developed at School G, resulting in the rapid erosion of teachers' strong initial support for the principal. Although much was happening at the school, School G saw little change in the classroom instruction and its MSPAP scores declined during the 1997/98 school year. Many teachers decided to leave the school.

Matters did not improve during the 1998/99 school year. Student mobility rates increased and the student body became increasingly poor, with approximately 60 percent qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The spring of 1999 saw parents picketing in front of the school demanding safe environment for students and complaining about the school's non-graded instruction. MSPAP test scores fell yet again. For the first time ever, the school scored below the district average. Again, several faculty members departed at the end of the school year and during the summer of 1999, the principal was replaced.

School G's new principal brought hope for the school. She was creative in juggling the school's meager finances; she listened to the teachers, and quickly acted on their advice on many levels. New classrooms were built in a previously open space and a new portable classroom was added to provide a space for an in-house suspension center and an additional classroom. A full-time policewoman and a part-time correctional officer joined the staff to help maintain order in the school. Non-graded instruction was replaced with grade teams. Planning time was organized for grade-level teachers and emphasis on parents' involvement was added. The school started the district's new math program and piloted a new science program. The principal introduced a reading program supported by a reading professional from the local university and two new reading teachers. In the fall, she observed teachers in their classrooms and, with assistance from the school's department heads and district specialists, analyzed their work. She realized that with so many new, untrained teachers, professional development had to be her top priority. Thus, she encouraged and, in some cases, demanded teacher participation in professional training organized by the local school district, nearby universities, and other professional organizations. At the same time, she retained the test preparation activities instituted by the previous principal and, as testing time was approaching, she exerted more pressure on teachers to get ready for the MFT and MSPAP tests.

However, as the school year passed, the initial enthusiasm for the principal began to wane among the staff. According to some teachers, it was obvious that she adhered to a top-down managerial style and did not welcome dissent. In addition, they believed her emphasis on testing was too strong. Teachers' morale began to slide yet again and absenteeism increased. For various reasons, six teachers left the school during the school year. Nonetheless, despite the growing unrest, School G's MSPAP test scores rose considerably in the year 2000. Thanks to the principal's hard work, short-term results were evident. However, whether she will be able to create a stable learning environment remains to be seen.

SCHOOL ALPHA

by Bob Pettit

This is a single-case study of an elementary school called Alpha[1] and how it has responded to state sanctions and assistance. Access to this school proved to be quite easy, except for the normal problems of logistics that might be expected. In an initial meeting with the superintendent, the researcher was given very positive support. A follow-up letter was promptly taken to the Board of Education for approval. Access at the school was similarly positive. Both principals involved in the research were supportive and helpful. When interviews had to be rescheduled for some reason, those administrators took the responsibility of assisting the researcher. For the most part, staff members mirrored this cooperative attitude. Only one respondent declined to have the interview tape-recorded. No staff members appeared to resent the research.

From the beginning of the study, two themes quickly emerged, and it may be helpful to note those here at the beginning. First, there has been a remarkable rate of turnover in the principal's position. The progression of principals is so complex that a table is used later in this study to explain it. Second, the student population of Alpha is considered by some staff members to be challenging. Even though Alpha is located in a relatively small city by urban standards, its socioeconomic environment can be considered similar to that of an inner-city school.

The study is organized into five main parts. An introduction to the study will discuss the statewide accountability system that affects Alpha and the status of Alpha within that accountability system. The second part will look briefly at the external conditions of the school, including the community and district in which Alpha resides. The third part of the study will describe several of the internal conditions that affect Alpha. The fourth section looks at how Alpha has dealt with accountability. Finally, a fifth part outlines the steps Alpha has taken in response to its accountability status.

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[1] "Alpha" is a pseudonym used to refer to the school under study.

Introduction to the Study

An initial description of the statewide accountability system and the accountability status of Alpha is essential to an understanding of this case study.

Statewide Accountability System

Alpha is located in Kentucky, which has a statewide system of accountability. This system operates in biennia, as opposed to single school years. The assessment results for a school are accumulated over a two-year period and are weighted by the number of students at the assessment levels. The results form an accountability index for the school. The accountability index is used to establish target points both for rewards and for sanctions. The current school year (1999-2000) is the last year of the third biennium during which a school could experience either rewards or sanctions. Due to changes implemented in the accountability system during the course of this study, those sanctions are voluntary during the current biennium.

Accountability Status of Alpha

Alpha was designated as an unsuccessful school for the 1998-2000 biennium, during which this case study took place. However, Alpha was also designated as "in decline" for the 1994-1996 biennium, the first biennium during which schools in Kentucky could receive either rewards or sanctions, although full sanctions were postponed until 1996. During the intermediate biennium, 1996-1998, Alpha was designated as eligible for rewards. The accountability status of Alpha is important for an understanding of this case study because many of the informants were present during both biennia of sanctions; some of their comments are related to their experiences in the 1996-1998 biennium, and other comments are related to their experiences in the 1998-2000 biennium.

External Conditions of the School

Alpha exists within larger contexts. There are local conditions, including the city and county that contain Alpha's attendance district, the socioeconomic environment, and the school district. There is also the state context, particularly the state reform environment.

The Local Environment

The county is in a relatively flat portion of Kentucky, and is bounded on one side by a neighboring state. Based upon 1997 population estimates, the county's population places it within the top 10 percent of Kentucky's 120 counties (Government Information Sharing Project, 2000). Based upon the 1990 census and 1999 population estimates, the county is growing at a slower rate than the state as a whole. During that time period, Kentucky population increased by 7.4 percent, while this county's rate of growth was only 2.4 percent (Kentucky Information Page, n.d.).

Within the county, there are two incorporated cities. The most recent population estimates by city show Alpha's city with approximately 40 percent of the county's population, while the other incorporated city has less than one percent of the county's population. Approximately 60 percent of the county's residents live outside the boundaries of incorporated cities (Kentucky State Data Center, n.d.). While both Kentucky and the county are increasing in population, this city showed a decline in population from 1990 to 1998 and slipped several places in the statewide rankings (Kentucky State Data Center, n.d.).

The county had a 1997 per capita personal income that was above the Kentucky average and slightly below the national average. The change in per capita personal income from 1996 to 1997 was slightly below that of Kentucky as a whole, and slightly above the national change (Government Information Sharing Project, 2000). Employment statistics for 1997 show that services and retail trade account for about 50 percent of the total county employment (Government Information Sharing Project, 2000).

A regional airport, a daily newspaper, and several television and radio stations serve the area. In addition to the two public school systems, there is a community college and two vocational education centers (capitolimpact.com, 2000a; capitolimpact.com, 2000b).

Alpha is a part of an independent public school district. In Kentucky, most public school districts are, by default, organized by counties. Within a county, however, a municipality can establish its own school district, independent of the county district. This is such a district. Within the district, Alpha is located within one of the poorer areas of the city with an industrial section located just a few blocks from the school. Within sight of the school are several small store buildings, some of which are abandoned. One building that had been a grocery at one time is now used as a meeting place for a veterans group. Closer to the school is a residential section. Most of the houses appear to be single-family, lower-income homes. Staff members at Alpha refer to one or more housing projects within their attendance area, but those are not within the immediate vicinity of the school. Although many students walk to school, most of them are bussed to the school.

The socioeconomic status of the school and neighborhood can be seen from several statistics. First, the Consolidated Plan (School Improvement Plan) for Alpha for the current accountability biennium (1998-2000) states that "92 percent of the [Alpha] student body is on free and reduced lunch, thus reflecting a low socioeconomic background." Data available from the Kentucky Department of Education yield similar results, as shown in the following table:

Table 2 - Comparison of Free and Reduced Price Eligibility

		School Year			
		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Alpha	% Free	79%	86%	85%	84%
	% Reduced	4%	4%	7%	6%
	% Total Free and Reduced[2]	83%	89%	92%	89%
District Beta	% Free	53%	63%	56%	60%
	% Reduced	4%	5%	6%	6%
	% Total Free and Reduced[2]	57%	69%	62%	65%
County District[3]	% Free	22%	22%	24%	25%
	% Reduced	5%	5%	6%	7%
	% Total Free and Reduced[2]	27%	28%	29%	32%
KY[4]	% Free	39%[5]	36%	39%	39%
	% Reduced	7%[5]	7%	8%	9%
	% Total Free and Reduced[2]	46%[5]	43%	47%	48%

(Kentucky Department of Education, 2000d)

From this table, one can notice the discrepancy in socioeconomic status between Alpha and its district. During the 1998-1999 school year, Alpha had 89 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced lunches, as compared to 65 percent eligibility for the district as a whole. Furthermore, there is a significant discrepancy between this district and its encompassing county district. During this same time period, the county district had only 32 percent eligibility for free or reduced lunches, approximately one-half the rate of Alpha's district and approximately one-third the rate of Alpha.

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[2] Rounding accounts for those instances where the total does not equal the sum of free and reduced percentages.

[3] This is the county public school district that encompasses the independent district.

[4] This represents statewide public school data and excludes two military dependent districts within the state.

[5] Statewide public school totals were not included in the 1995-1996 data file, and were calculated by aggregating district data.

For the county as a whole, four "child well-being trends" showed more than a 20 percent change. One of those was a positive change, and the other three were negative changes. From 1989-91 to 1996-98, infant mortality declined by 22 percent. During that same time period, however, children with birth weights under 5.5 pounds increased by 29 percent. Between 1989 and 1995, the poverty rate for children in the 0-4 age group increased by 22 percent. From 1996 to 1998, incidents of neglect/dependency increased by 29 percent (Kentucky State Data Center, 1999).

The school district has approximately half the number of students of the county school district (capitolimpact.com, 2000b). Within the district, Alpha enrolls approximately one-fourth of the elementary students. Students in all elementary schools progress through a single middle school and high school (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999a).

As a part of a district, Alpha is subject to a variety of influences concerning both curriculum and instruction. For example, there is a district curriculum in some subjects (Interviews KYB07, KYB08, KYB10). There was no expressed objection to such a district curriculum, which would lead one to presume that it offers some flexibility at the school level. As another example, one teacher reported membership in a district committee that was dealing with instructional issues.

> We're seeing changes with the writing with the consultant being in the school. We've started a math study group, which I'm chairing, a district-wide group for fifth through eighth grade math teachers. And we're starting discussions on how to teach, first of all what's necessary through the core content and then from that we're starting to spring into how do we do this. (Interview KYB18)

The consultant mentioned above was, according to one respondent, brought into the school by the district through federal funding. (Interview KYB12)

This presents a picture of Alpha as a school working in partnership with its district. There are, however, other points of view about the relationship between the school and the district that will be discussed later in the study.

The State Reform Environment

Alpha exists within a statewide environment of school reform. During the last ten years, that environment has had a significant impact upon education throughout the state. The Kentucky Department of Education describes nine strands of school reform brought about by the Kentucky Education Reform Act, commonly known as KERA:

- **Preschool programs** support at-risk students by providing a curriculum to prepare them for success in primary school.
- **Primary School programs** provide children with non-competitive classrooms using developmentally appropriate practices.
- **Kentucky's assessment program (KIRIS[6])** reflects real-life learning experiences and holds districts/schools accountable for student learning.[7]
- **Professional development** of administrators and teachers is central to transforming the learning environment and is critical to the success of KERA.
- **Regional Service Centers** are local, instructional resources for school districts and schools. **School-based councils** composed of teachers, parents, and administrators share decision-making on issues affecting curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- **Expanded technology (KETS)[8]** supports curriculum, assessment, and professional development; enhances communication; and facilitates administrative support services.
- **Extended School Services** programs offer expanded learning opportunities for students.

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[6] Kentucky Instructional Results Information System

[7] This assessment program is now referred to as Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System (CATS). And, while Alpha's designation as eligible for sanctions during this biennium depended on KIRIS results, its students were tested in spring, 1999 and again in spring, 2000 using CATS.

[8] KETS is the acronym for Kentucky Education Technology System.

- **Family Resource and Youth Service Centers** support curriculum and instruction by addressing students' needs for physical and emotional wellness. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999d)

Several of these elements of state reform are visible within Alpha, including a primary program and a resource center for families of Alpha's students. Naturally, elements of the assessment and accountability system were also visible during the course of this study. Perhaps the greatest impact upon the school has come from the state's system of accountability. That system holds schools accountable for increasing student performance over time. It is important to clarify that the school's current designation as unsuccessful or eligible for sanctions was derived from its performance under the previous accountability system. The school was observed during a transitional biennium.

Under the newly revised accountability system, each school establishes a starting point, or baseline, from scores obtained during the 1998-2000 biennium. Each school has a goal of 100 points, which must be reached by 2014. Points are derived from both cognitive and non-cognitive measures.

The cognitive measures, in the elementary school, are administered now at grade levels as shown in the following table:

Table 3 - Elementary Assessment Overview

TESTS/Grade	**Exiting Primary**	**Grade 4**	**Grade 5**
Norm Referenced Test (Reading, Math, Language Arts)	X		
READING 24 Multiple Choice 6 Open Response		X	
MATHEMATICS 24 Multiple Choice 6 Open Response			X
SCIENCE 24 Multiple Choice		X	

6 Open Response			
SOCIAL STUDIES 24 Multiple Choice 6 Open Response			X
WRITING PORTFOLIOS Grade 4 = 4 pieces		X	
WRITING ON DEMAND PROMPT Student chooses one of 2 prompts		X	
ARTS AND HUMANITIES 8 Multiple Choice 2 Open Response			X
PRACTICAL LIVING & VOCATIONAL STUDIES 8 Multiple Choice 2 Open Response			X

(Kentucky Department of Education, 2000e)

At the elementary level, there are also two non-cognitive measures included in the accountability rating, or index: attendance and retention (failing a grade). All of the measures, both cognitive and non-cognitive, are assigned relative weights as follows:

Table 4 – Assessment Weights

Accountability Area	Weight
Reading	19%
Mathematics	19%
Science	14.25%
Social Studies	14.25%
Writing Portfolio	11.4%
Writing Prompt	2.85%
Arts and Humanities	4.75%
Practical Living/Vocational Studies	4.75%
Norm-referenced Test	5%
Attendance	3.8%
Retention	.95%

(Kentucky Department of Education, 1999b)

For all cognitive areas, index points are assigned on a scale of 0 to 140, based upon each student's level of performance. The following table describes the value assigned to each performance level:

Table 5 - CATS Performance Level Values

Performance Level	Reading Mathematics Science Social Studies	Writing Arts and Humanities Practical Living/Vocational Studies
Non-performance	0	0
Medium Novice	13	13
High Novice	26	
Low Apprentice	40	60
Medium Apprentice	60	
High Apprentice	80	
Proficient	100	100
Distinguished	140	140

(Kentucky Department of Education, 2000e)

The cognitive portion of assessment results prior to the 1999 assessment were calculated differently, as shown by the following table:

Table 6 - KIRIS Performance Level Values

Performance Level	Assigned Weight
Novice	0
Apprentice	40
Proficient	100
Distinguished	140

A comparison of the two tables above shows that an identical distribution of performance levels would result in different accountability scores under the original Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) and under the new Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System (CATS), since partial credit is now given for subcategories within the novice and apprentice areas. The following table illustrates the different academic indices obtained from identical performance levels in reading, math, science or social studies:

Table 7 - Sample Calculation of KIRIS and CATS Indices

Performance Level	Percent of Students	KIRIS Weights	KIRIS Index	CATS Weights	CATS Index
Non-performance	10	0	0	0	0
Medium Novice	10	0	0	13	1.3
High Novice	10	0	0	26	2.6

Low Apprentice	10	40	4	40	4
Medium Apprentice	20	40	8	60	12
High Apprentice	10	40	4	80	8
Proficient	20	100	20	100	20
Distinguished	10	140	14	140	14
Total Index			50		61.9

This difference in calculating the academic portion of the accountability index makes it difficult to look at longitudinal data that includes the 1999 or subsequent accountability years. This will become more obvious when Alpha's accountability results are presented.

Internal Conditions of the School

General Description

During the 1999-2000 school year, Alpha enrolled 459 students in kindergarten through grade six. Over the past five school years, Alpha's enrollment has remained relatively constant, both in number and as a percent of district enrollment, as shown in the following table:

Table 8 - Alpha Enrollment Trends

School Year	Alpha's Enrollment	Percent of District Enrollment
1995-1996	472	13.0%
1996-1997	482	14.5%
1997-1998	446	12.9%
1998-1999	443	12.6%
1999-2000	459	14.4%

Documents KYBD02, KYBD03, KYBD04, KYBD05
(Kentucky Department of Education, 1999a)

For the 1999-2000 school year, 32.8 certified teaching positions served Alpha's students. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999a)

The building itself is not unlike many other elementary schools in Kentucky – the main part of the building is thirty or more years old, and there is a newer addition attached. The original part of the building consists of two floors. Classrooms in this part of the building currently house intermediate grade classrooms. As in many older schools, the rooms and halls have dropped ceilings. A smaller basement provides space for special area classes. The school cafeteria is also on the lower level of the building. The addition to the building, which may have been done in two stages, contains primary classrooms and the school library. For the most part, the building is clean and neat. Some clutter was observed in a classroom towards the end of the school year, but this was because that classroom was being moved over the summer. The main entrance to the building is bright, with windows both on the outside wall and on an inside wall separating the foyer from the office. There are benches in the foyer. Inside the office, a counter separates the work area from a small reception area. In one part of the library are several computers, forming a small computer lab of sorts. There are also computers in the classrooms. However, there was little use of computers noted during the study. Overall, Alpha presents a fairly average picture of an older school building in Kentucky. It does not give the appearance of deterioration; neither does it compare to newer, more modern buildings.

The general tone or atmosphere of the school is pleasant. Students are friendly and do not seem to hesitate to speak to visitors. Noise levels within the building were quite low, even during the last week of the school year. The cafeteria was, predictably, the noisiest part of the building, but even that noise level was not beyond the average. The movement of students from one part of the building to another was generally orderly, and certainly not chaotic. While somewhat noisier, the movement to and from the building was fairly typical of elementary school students. The interaction between adults and students was somewhat difficult to gauge. Classroom interactions were professional and reserved. However, all visits to the school were announced, and all classroom observations were scheduled, so the study itself may have made these interactions atypical.

Alpha serves students in kindergarten through grade six. For the most part, classrooms are self-contained and house single grades (Documents KYBD06, KYBD08). There are several ways to look at student-teacher ratio. Dividing the 1999-2000 enrollment by the number of certified teaching positions yields a ratio of 14:1. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999a) This is somewhat misleading because the number of certified teaching positions includes special area teachers. Therefore, the ratio does not describe typical classroom size. Another way to look at student-teacher ratio is to take the same enrollment and compare it to the number of classroom teaching positions shown for Alpha (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999a; Document KYBD08). This yields a ratio of approximately 19:1, which is a better approximation of actual class size. Perceptions among teachers concerning class size are varied. The following illustrate that variety:

> It's not the school's fault but I really feel like our class sizes are still too large. And I don't know what we can do about. I think when we look at a child and we see a need then we need to do what we can to meet that need but some of it is just strictly out of our hands. And I think class size is an important part of that. (Interview KYB06)

> I think this number of students is okay at this point. I only have 19. I think when you get up around 22, 24, 26 . . . that's way over, that's way too many. . . My class size right now is okay I'm comfortable with it but if you get up around 26 yeah you need smaller classrooms and you need a lot more help. (Interview KYB07)

Beyond the regular classroom teachers, Alpha has one principal and one assistant principal. These two administrators describe themselves as complementary in their personalities and duties. In addition to a guidance counselor, there are three categories of support staff in the school. There are special area teachers for music, art, physical education, and library. Five special education teachers serve children with a variety of disabilities. In addition, three teachers work with Reading Recovery, a program aimed at early intervention with students with reading problems.

In addition to the school staff described above, the state has assigned one Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) to the school. During the interim accountability period, this assistance is optional on the part of the school. Highly Skilled Educators are external change agents trained by the Kentucky Department of Education to assist schools where assessment results have declined. They have produced a very high rate of success in schools where they have been assigned (Kentucky Department of Education, 2000b).

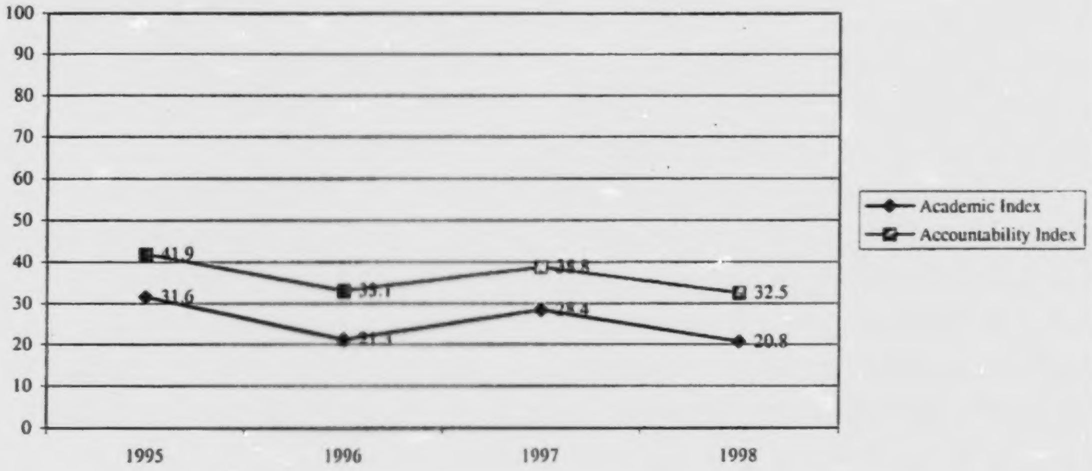
School Performance

Two points need to be made before discussing Alpha's performance within the state accountability system. First, the long-term goal is for all Kentucky schools to reach an accountability index of 100. As can be seen from the previous discussion of Kentucky's system of accountability, 100 is the weight assigned to proficient performance. The actual theoretical limit of scores goes beyond 100, however, since distinguished performance has a weight of 140. In fact, there are elementary schools in Kentucky that have an index in a particular academic area that already exceeds 100. The accountability index is based primarily upon performance in each academic area, but noncognitive indicators are also factored into the index. At the elementary level, noncognitive indicators are derived from a combination of the attendance rate and the inverse of the retention rate (repeating a grade). The maximum noncognitive index would be 100, which would result from a perfect attendance rate (100%) and no retentions (100%-0%). With a limit of 140 for each cognitive area, and a limit of 100 in the noncognitive index, the theoretical upper limit for an accountability index is somewhere between 130 and 140, depending upon the weight assigned to the noncognitive index. (The theoretical limit is further complicated by the addition of a norm-referenced test. This test was not a part of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), which is the basis for the following two charts. It will be a factor in the revised Commonwealth Accountability System (CATS) which begins with the 1998-2000 biennium.)

The second point concerns revisions to the accountability system, such as adding or subtracting assessment elements or changing the weights of various elements. As those changes are made, they are made by biennium. Calculations are made so that a biennium can be equitably compared to both the previous and the subsequent biennia. It is possible, then, for a school to have two accountability indices for the same biennium. One is used to measure progress against the previous biennium, and the other is used as a baseline to be compared to the next biennium. The results shown in the following two charts come from the comparable data collected in the second and third biennia (1994-1995 through 1997-1998).

During the second and third biennia, Alpha's accountability results showed an up-and-down movement. The following chart shows both the academic trend and the overall accountability trend through those two biennia:

Chart 1
Accountability and Academic Indices over Second and Third Biennia



Document KYBD01

A school's accountability status is determined by the weighted average of scores from each year of a biennium. The following table will illustrate Alpha's accountability status:

Table 9 – Calculation of Accountability Status for Alpha

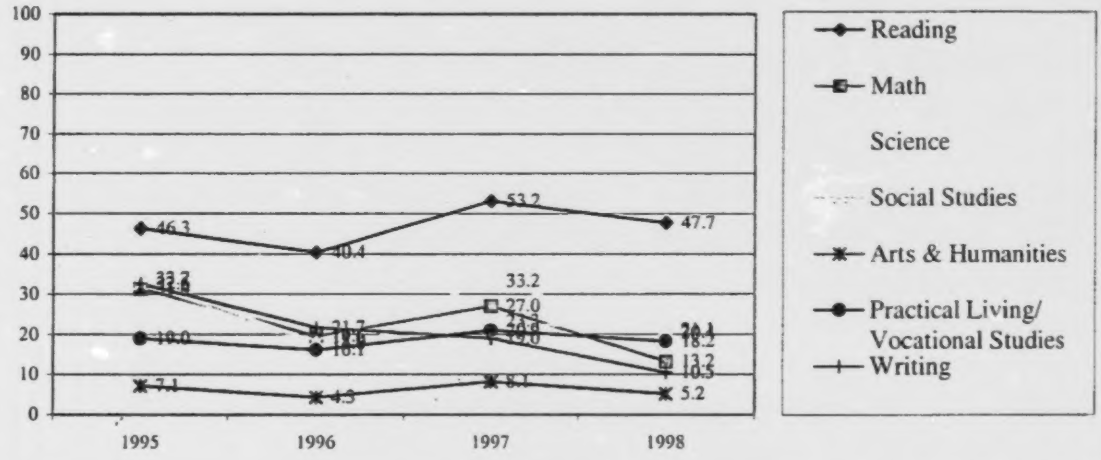
1994-1995 Accountability Index	41.9	
1994-1995 Number Tested	70	
Number Tested times Accountability Index		2933
1995-1996 Accountability Index	33.1	
1995-1996 Number Tested	51	
Number Tested times Accountability Index		1688.1
Sum of the Two Products	4621.1	
Sum of the Number Tested	121	
Sum of Products Divided by Sum of Number Tested		38.2

Document KYB01

The weighted average of 38.2 that results from this calculation is the school's baseline, or starting point, for the two biennia to be compared. From this baseline, a goal is calculated. In Alpha's case, that goal was 44.4. Had Alpha's weighted average for the next biennium exceeded that goal, they would have been eligible for rewards. Instead, a weighted calculation using the same process as above shows that Alpha's weighted average for the third biennium was 35.3. Since this score was lower than the baseline, Alpha became eligible for state assistance (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998).

Alpha's individual academic results show that same up-and-down movement over the two biennia, as illustrated in the following chart:

Chart 2
Academic Trend over Second and Third Biennia



Document KYBD01

Further evidence of the school's up-and-down movement comes from the fact that Alpha achieved reward status for the 1994-1996 biennium. That means that their weighted index for the second biennium, shown above, was above both the baseline and the goal for the preceding biennium.

The fourth accountability biennium, 1998-2000, begins the new CATS accountability system. Because those scores cannot be compared with the previous KIRIS accountability system, Kentucky has devised an interim system for maintaining accountability during the transition from KIRIS to CATS. From the third biennium weighted average, a predicted performance level has been established for each school for fourth biennium results. (Kentucky Department of Education, 2000a) The following chart shows Alpha's performance at the midpoint of the fourth accountability biennium:

Table 10 - Fourth Biennium Midpoint Status for Alpha

Third biennium (1996-1998) baseline	Predicted performance for fourth biennium	Midpoint (1998-1999) Result	Difference from baseline	Difference from prediction
35.3	47.5	47.1	11.8	-0.4

(Kentucky Department of Education, 2000c)

While these scores show progress, Alpha was still slightly below their fourth biennium goal. Based upon these same calculations, approximately 58 percent of Kentucky's elementary schools met or exceeded their fourth biennium goal (Kentucky Department of Education, 2000a).

As a part of the noncognitive index, attendance contributes much less to the performance index than do the academic indices. However, since attendance should have an impact on those academic indices, a look at Alpha's attendance pattern may be helpful. During the second and third biennia, Alpha's attendance rate was consistently above 90 percent, as shown in the following table:

Table 11 - Attendance Trend

School Year	Attendance Rate
1994-1995	94.9%
1995-1996	94.3%
1996-1997	92.4%
1997-1998	92.8%

Document KYBD01

The above table, however, also shows a definite decline of about two percent from the second to the third biennium. However, since attendance is only one part of the noncognitive index, and since the maximum possible noncognitive index is 100, a decline of two percent would have very little impact on the school's overall performance score. A more important reason to be concerned about the attendance rate would be the extent to which attendance plays a role in academic performance. One respondent reported that the school had plans to try to improve the attendance rate. The only specific plan mentioned was to reduce the number of suspensions, which had apparently been high in the past.

> We had children who had been suspended in the elementary, in the primary level even 25, 30 times in a year. That's a lot of your school year that's been lost so we've kind of made a commitment that we're not going to do that. We're going to keep these kids in here. We send them out if they happen to have a tremendously bad day and do something very—hit somebody or hit a teacher or something like that we normally suspend for one day. We normally then put them into a training process within the school so that they are here and we can see to it that they're getting some of their academics as well. But I think that's a major issue here over the past several years is the amount of time that the kids have spent out of school. (Interview KYB17)

Management and Leadership

One of the major issues at Alpha is the turnover in principals. The following table illustrates that turnover:

Table 12 - Principal Turnover for Alpha

School Year	Principal
1992-1993	A
1993-1994	B
1994-1995	B/A
1995-1996	C
1996-1997	D
1997-1998	E
1998-1999	F
1999-2000	E

A brief explanation of the above chart may help in understanding principal turnover at Alpha. Prior to the 1992-1993 school year, Alpha was one of two schools that are now combined. One was a primary school, and the other an intermediate school. During the 1994-1995 school year, principal B retired, and principal A returned from retirement to complete the year. Principal D was a teacher at Alpha before becoming principal for the 1996-1997 school year. Following the 1996-1997 school year, principal D took a leave of absence to join the state's Distinguished Educator program. During D's absence, principal E served during the 1997-1998 school year. There was a problem with E's certification, and principal F was assigned during the 1998-1999 school year on an interim basis while principal E was assigned elsewhere and worked on proper certification. Principal D left the Distinguished Educator program after two years and returned to the district. During the time D was on leave, the Kentucky Department of Education changed its interpretation of the procedure for principals returning from leave, deciding that school councils must treat the position as newly vacant. Principal D applied for the principal's position for the 1999-2000 school year, but Alpha's council decided to hire principal E instead. Finally, principal F remains at Alpha as the current assistant principal.

Between the two school years included in this study, six classroom teachers left Alpha. One of those was a retirement, and another was caused by a spouse's job change. The other four teachers transferred to other schools.

In spite of the principal turnover described in the previous section, school management appeared to be fairly efficient. During the first year of observation, there was frequent and visible communication between the acting principal and the person who would return to that position the following year. During the second year of observation, the acting principal moved to the assistant principal's role. This appeared to cause no conflict in their relationship.

As might be expected, considering the principal turnover, most of the internal conflict in Alpha stems from this instability. There appear to be two factions: one felt that Principal D should have been returned to the principal's position upon returning from a leave of absence, and the other felt that the council was right to choose principal E. Most people seem to feel that principal E can unite the faculty, but at least one teacher admitted that the council's choice was a factor in the decision to transfer to another school (Field notes 5/20/1999).

Observed interruptions during instructional time were minimal. During the first year of the study, observations were conducted near the end of the school year. Several field trips took place during this time. Perhaps the best indicator of Alpha's learning climate comes from the first year's classroom observations, which took place within the last few weeks of school. Researchers were somewhat surprised by the lack of a "let-down" at this time of year. Other than the field trips mentioned above, classroom activities seemed academically focused. (Field notes 5/24/1999)

Communication and Decision Making

School-based decision making (SBDM) is a part of school reform in Kentucky. An SBDM council chaired by the principal with three teachers and two parents elected by those two groups governs Alpha. All of Kentucky's SBDM councils have similar responsibilities under the SBDM laws and regulations:

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE SBDM LAW

GENERAL POLICY

- To enhance achievement and meet the KERA goals

SPECIFIC POLICIES

- curriculum (that is, what to teach)
- assigning staff time
- assigning students to classes and programs
- school schedule
- use of school space
- instructional practices (how to teach)
- discipline and classroom management
- extracurricular programs
- processes for deciding alignment with state standards, technology use, and program appraisal
- committees

- consultation in filling vacancies

PERSONNEL AND HIRING

- Decide how many people to employ in each job classification (that is, how many teachers, how many aides, how many custodians, and so on).
- Select new principal
- Consult with the principal before he or she select people to be hired for other jobs.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Choose textbooks
- Choose instructional materials (things that help students learn or help teachers teach, other than textbooks).
- Choose student support services (activities that help student be ready and able to learn).
- Organize the Primary Program (Kentucky Department of Education, 1999c)

The SBDM council meeting observed seemed to run smoothly. At the meeting, there was a time allowed for input from non-council members concerning items on the agenda, and items not covered by the agenda (Meeting observation notes, 5/10/1999). Teacher meetings also appeared to be well organized. Participants seemed to feel free to speak up about the issues being discussed (Meeting observation notes, 5/11/1999).

A larger issue, perhaps, is the role of the SBDM council and of teacher meetings in the school improvement process. In Kentucky, the school council is responsible for overseeing the preparation of a school improvement plan. In many Kentucky schools, this means that a committee is assigned to each component, or improvement area, of the improvement plan. Component committees were mentioned at Alpha and had obviously met at some point in the past to write the improvement plan.

> I was the component lead for the reading section and we had a committee that was made of just different teachers from different areas. We had some special area teachers and classroom teachers and some teacher assistants. We looked at the reading curriculum in the school. We looked at our test data and tried to analyze where our strengths and weaknesses were and what areas to improve the reading. (Interview KYB16)

However, in early November, well into the school year, the principal reported that component committees had not yet begun meeting. (Field notes, 11/1/99) In addition, some teachers reported knowing little about the school's improvement plan, raising doubts about the influence of the plan upon daily instruction.

Informal decision making patterns are more difficult to determine. There appear to be mixed feelings among staff members concerning the amount of influence they have when decisions are made.

Dealing with Accountability

Reactions to Accountability

This school has been placed under state sanctions for a second time.[9] In general, Alpha is reacting well to their second placement in sanctions. While it is not something they would have sought, they generally feel that they have benefited from state assistance. As one respondent put it, "... you hate to be classified as that but I really think that we've learned a lot ..." (Interview KYB14) Among the benefits of their accountability status, respondents at Alpha mentioned two most often. The first was added financial resources. The second, and mentioned the most frequently and positively, was the human resource of the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE, formerly know as a Distinguished Educator, or DE). In fact, only one respondent had a negative view of the assistance provided by the HSE. Most reactions to the HSE were similar to the following two examples:

> When we were in decline before and we had our distinguished educator here she was wonderful and she really did help us. She helped us to see where our weaknesses were, to focus on you know working on our weaknesses. First you

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[9] As mentioned earlier, Alpha's second placement in state sanctions was voluntary on the part of the school because of the transition from one accountability model to a revised model.

> have to identify them and know where the loopholes are you know and what you're leaving out of your curriculum, what you need to put in and she helped us immensely with that. Yeah, that... It's wonderful having these ladies come in and keeping some objective point of view. (Interview KYB07)

> Our HSE came in and worked with my children on general and specific. She spoke to me about things needed in their writing and we talked about how when students write they kind of generalized and they needed specifics and she worked with them on that and then singled out a few students and worked with them individually. She's really helped. (Interview KYB15)

Even though staff members see benefits from their accountability status, many believe their placement is unfair, as will be seen in a subsequent section.

On a personal level, most teachers expressed little to no fear that their careers would be negatively impacted by state sanctions. This is possibly due to the fact that there are no real sanctions, other than the public identification of the school as one that has not performed adequately according to state standards. If full state sanctions had been in effect during the study, those reactions might have been different.

Perceptions within Alpha of support from the district office are predictably varied and probably depend upon the roles of the respondents. Three quotes from interviews illustrate the variety within staff member perceptions:

> You see the Central Office is always here. They're visible you know… As I was telling you before these people might be in this building even though they are Central Office on a daily basis. So they're not just over there behind their desk[s], we actually get to see them and work with them. (Interview KYB03)

> District, I want to believe that the support is there. The support has been vocalized for us. I don't know that I see concrete evidence of the support but that may be an unfair statement you know because I don't know a lot about the running of the central office so you know I don't want to say that the support is not there. (Interview KYB04)

> We don't see much of them. We don't see much of them at all. And I feel like that this school above all the schools in town needs some extra attention. (Interview KYB06)

An interview with a district office person sheds some light upon the variation in these quotes from teachers. The administrator spoke of daily contact with the school.

> Previously I said daily meaning I'm usually in contact with an administrator or the social worker for one reason or another just answering questions about implementation, resources that sort of thing...I talk frequently with the writing consultant assigned there. Other issues that come up that I meet with them about as we go through consolidated planning. I'm here as an advisor to help them find resources and that sort of thing. (Interview KYB18)

This statement indicates that there are lines of communication between the district office and the school, and that those in the school may not be aware of those lines unless they are directly involved in them. This is confirmed by the fact that at least one district office person has knowledge of programs within the school and can speak knowledgeably about the school (Interview KYB18).

Most of those who responded to inquiries about their future plans expressed the intent to stay at the school. Again, the responses seem to stem from the educator's point of view concerning the children of the school. "I really feel that these children need me and I have come to realize over the last [number of] years that I need them a lot more than they do me" (Interview KYB04). Another commented that he/she would have already left if it were not a clear choice to stay at Alpha, and yet another mentioned having turned down the opportunity to transfer to a school that would be considered more desirable (Interviews KYB05 and KYB15).

In spite of this apparent commitment that some teachers have to remain at the school, the school cannot be considered to be an organization that works together as one unit. One teacher described the school as "splintered, extremely splintered right now" (Interview KYB05). Another expressed it this way: "There have been days I would have liked to have had a chute that shot me from my car right up into my window and I wouldn't have had to see anybody else" (Interview KYB04). While this may not be a majority opinion of the educators within the building, those who see this "splintering" mention three distinct types of division: race, interpersonal relations, and perceptions of student ability. The following quote illustrate the first two of those beliefs: "...I can be candid and say it's a division, there is a racial division, a very bad racial division. There is division about some like this person, some like that person, if you don't like this person then you don't like me" (Interview KYB05). The third belief is illustrated by this quote: "It's hard for me to explain but a lot of people fuss that, that we just, that our kids can't do it..." (Interview KYB15). Again, these may not be majority opinions. However, they point out at least some divisions within the school that could affect the intentions of educators in the future to remain at this school. And, in fact, there was a sizeable turnover in teachers during the summer between observation years. While most of those changes had neutral reasons behind them, at least two changes resulted from transfer requests (Interview KYB19).

Perceived Reasons for Repeated Sanctions

Respondents see several reasons for their past and current accountability status. Two of those reasons mentioned most often will be discussed. First, they point to inconsistent leadership, caused by a high rate of principal turnover. The phrase "six principals in six years" is heard frequently in the building. They do not necessarily fault the individual administrators, but feel that the turnover rate has held them back. Specific comments include the following:

> Well I think we have a real problem with leadership. We have no stable leader. I think a lot of the people that have come in have been good leaders but have not been allowed to stay long enough to fulfill their destiny in a way you know. You can only do so much in a year and it's . . . What this school needs is a person who's going to stay here and work with us for several years because I don't think it's going to turnaround in a year. I think it can turnaround but not in as short a time as we've given the past five or six people to do it. And they've all been good people. (Interview KYB05)

They also believe that principal turnover has taken away from some of the benefits provided by the state accountability program. For example, one respondent felt that the HSE program had benefited the school, but not as much as it could have if there had been consistent leadership:

> Yes I think we have in some ways because of some of the programs and the professional development that we talked about. Again, I think you know maybe if we had the same leadership from the beginning of this we would have had, I don't know more of a benefit or been able to take advantage of it in a better way. (Interview KYB16)

Perhaps the most insightful comment about the leadership issue came from this respondent:

> Something I see, and I'm as guilty as anybody, is that when we are not, when we don't have someone within our building to hold us strictly accountable no matter how good we are we slack and I guess that's human nature and that's what I've seen. I saw, I guess for a couple of years, we pretty much did our own thing. We knew what to do but there was not a lot of continuity here. There was not a lot of meeting and discussion among the staff members. Sometimes we didn't even meet as teams. We knew that there was not going to be anybody darken the door and say, "what's going on?" . . . I think you have to be held accountable within your building as well as district-wide and statewide. There has to be somebody to know what is going on and to be sure that you are following the curriculum and following all the guidelines that you know you have to follow. (Interview KYB04)

The second reason seen for their return to sanctions involves their student population. Students are seen as lacking readiness for school, both academically and socially. This is also an area of division within the school. Those on one side of the issue believe that, for a variety of reasons, their students are not as capable as others and that the school cannot be held accountable for their performance. The following comments are fairly typical of this side of the issue:

> But I think we also honestly have to look at the children as they enter the school and in just the . . . years that I've been in elementary I can see a marked decline in the readiness of the children when they come to us even though they've been in Head Start. It's, it's very noticeable that the children that we get are just every year more disadvantaged, less mature ready to learn. (Interview KYB06)

> I don't think it is, honestly I don't think it's the teaching as much as it is the children. I think you can't... You have a different group of children each year that are tested and I think that is part of our problem. You may have a low group this

> year and a high group next year and no matter how hard you work they're still not going to perform as well as maybe the group before that. I don't think our teaching strategies have changed. I think we've, we've done everything possible to get them where they were and implemented every kind of program that we could possibly implement. (Interview KYB14)

> I try to provide my students with the best I can give them . . . take them as far as they can go . . . state standards and the state test are not going to change that." (Field notes, 10/18/1999)

Such comments seem to ignore the possibility that different groups of students may need different teaching strategies in order to be successful. They also ignore the fact that other schools with similar socioeconomic levels perform better within the accountability system (Document KYBD10).

Other staff members see Alpha's students in a different light. One respondent, when asked if these students could learn, answered: "They can do anything anybody else can do. They're outstanding . . . I think they need more than other children as far as socially and emotionally probably but intellectually they're right there" (Interview KYB15).

This division within the school about the capabilities of Alpha's students carries over into staff perceptions about the parents of those students. Most staff members see parent involvement as lacking. As one respondent put it, "Most of our parent-related activities are not supported very well." Concerning the PTA, that same respondent gave this impression concerning school funding: "…when you're talking about it they go, 'well everybody gets the same' but that's not really true because other schools have PTAs that work and earn thousands of dollars, they have CDs in the bank. We don't have… Our PTA doesn't function" (Interview KYB05). Another respondent put it this way:

> Our parents tend to be very inactive. At any given time when we've called, probably 50 percent of the parents do not have a telephone and so it's very difficult to make contact with them. Part of our discipline plan we're suppose to call the parent when the child first has their problem during the day to try and get

> them back on track and you find that just so many of them do not have a telephone or don't have a telephone this week but it will be back on next week but we've had a hard time trying to get parents involved. Not, it's not uncommon when we take two nights and stay over here for parent conferences for maybe teachers to have one or two parents come out of a class of 28. Our PTO has been just nonexistent this year. They haven't done anything to try to help the school. If we have PTO meetings unless there is a group within the school that draws a lot people performing there will be more teachers here by a long shot than parents. (Interview KYB06)

Perhaps because of this general impression among staff members, the school has begun a program to provide a core group of parents with "communication skills, skills that will enable these parents to go out and train other parents on how to be involved in a positive way in our school" (Interview KYB01).

A few staff members, however, see parent involvement in a slightly different light. Here is an example:

> I do think our parents are supportive. I have never personally run into a parent who was not supportive. I have not run into any major problems. I've run into some arguments and some questions but being a parent myself you know I don't blame them for that. Our parents don't always know, maybe how to deal tactfully with things but I think a lot of our parents don't value education for a lot of different reasons. Bad experiences when they were in school. Nobody valued education for them when they were growing up so our children you know face some environmental issues and problems but I think overall our parents are supportive and willing to participate in school activities if they're made to feel welcome. (Interview KYB04)

Another respondent provided a statement about parent involvement that could be considered a model approach:

> I have a lot of contact. I spend time weekly, written reports to the parents about work and behavior and any other things that I need to contact them about. I've had a lot of conferences. I've had a lot of success in getting the parents in for about the last three years I would say they've been really cooperative. They came out. There were about 65 people in the room, adults in our writing program the other day and you know I make phone calls. I make the phone calls that the parents don't dread because they never know. I mean I just call them just to say that your child is doing a great job. Today he learned to divide or whatever you know as well as those phone calls they do hate to get sometimes. But I've started off, I've really try

> to contact the parents once a week by phone and I do again you know what happens you know-two weeks, once a month. Usually I do talk to everybody once a month, those who I can get in touch with by phone. (Interview KYB11)

Steps Taken in Response to Decline

Alpha has taken several steps aimed at improving their performance on the state accountability system. These are steps that are, presumably, independent of the influence of the external change agent, or Highly Skilled Educator, placed within the school. Four of those steps will be briefly described.

First, they have engaged a university specialist to assist them with reading strategies across the curriculum. This specialist visits the school on a scheduled basis and conducts training in reading strategies. The researcher observed one such session (Interview KYB09; Meeting observation 10/25/1999).

Second, they have employed a part-time writing consultant to work with writing strategies throughout the curriculum (Interview KYB17). That consultant was a part of their Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grant (Interview KYB01), and their accountability status may have played a role in the award of this grant. This person has a strong background in writing and is assisting the school in improving writing throughout the school. On teacher expressed support for the consultant's work in the following way:

> And we never really had that so kids were coming to the fourth grade, which was the writing assessment area, level and they didn't have the basic skills when they walked in the room the first day and so the teachers were having to teach them from the very beginning on before they could even get them into the process. So we feel like that's a major area that we're addressing. (Interview KYB17)

Third, they have placed an emphasis upon discipline. They have adopted a school-wide discipline program and have employed a "deportment monitor" whose role it is to:

> serve as a role model for young men. He is in the classroom, he's in the hallways, he's in the cafeteria working with young men to provide a positive role model for them and to show them how to behave and how to react to people and how to talk and think and move and to just be that positive image that so many of these children do not receive at home. And he's been a tremendous help in the school. Children come to him and talk to him. (Interview KYB01)

Fourth, the school elected to receive a Highly Skilled Educator, or external change agent, provided by the state. As explained earlier, such assistance was voluntary during this stage of state accountability. The role of this person places him/her in contact with educators in several ways:

> I observe classroom activities. I observe the different teachers' strategies that they utilize...It just depends on their grade level...With some classes a lot of hands-on individual work. Some collaborative teaching. With other classes it's at times more of a lecture. I do see teachers, once they've made an assignment working with the students, striving to work with them more individually. There are some other things that I'm trying to move them towards. (Interview KYB20)

There are three other areas where one might have expected to see more activity than was visible in Alpha. First, there was not always a direct connection seen between instruction and assessment (Interview KYB10). Second, assessment artifacts were not observed in non-accountability areas of the school (Field notes, 5/24/1999). Third, there did not seem to be a great deal of activity centered on the school's consolidated improvement plan. While it is true that many activities and programs taking place in the school come from the consolidated plan, there appeared to be little follow-up activity once the plan was completed. As previously mentioned, except for the discipline committee other component committees of the consolidated plan had not yet begun to meet by the time observations were completed (Field notes, 11/1/1999).

Summary

Despite some problems, Alpha's future seems more likely to be positive than to be negative. Most of the staff members remaining at Alpha support the current principal, and that person seems committed to stay at the school long enough to provide some continuity. The principal also seems genuinely committed to increasing the performance of Alpha's students. To the researcher, the greatest challenge appears to be the varied perceptions concerning the ability of their students to learn. Perhaps the commitment of some staff members who firmly believe that all of their students can learn will gradually win over those whose expectations are lower.

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OAKDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL

by Margaret Quintero

External Conditions of the School

Oakdale Middle School is located within the second largest city and school district in Kentucky. The county has grown from a population of 225,000 in 1990 to more than 245,000 in 1999, representing an increase of 8.2 percent during the past decade. The drastic increase in the construction of new homes and apartment dwellings on land previously used for agricultural purposes reflects this growth. The population of the county is primarily Caucasian/White, and this sector comprises 84 percent of the population, 14 percent is African American, and the remaining two percent includes Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and other racial/ethnic groups.

Located within the city are the state land grant university, a liberal arts university and a community college. The Cabinet for Human Resources estimates that in 1999, there were 144,440 persons employed within the county and an additional 113,703 in the six surrounding counties. In 1997, the per capita income was $28,045 and the median household income was just over $36,000. Since 1991, the unemployment rate has decreased steadily from a level of 4.4 percent to a low of 2.0 percent in 1998. This is considerably lower than the statewide unemployment rate of 4.2 percent and the overall rate for the U.S., which is also 4.2 percent.

District

Within the district, there are 33 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, and 5 high schools, as well as several alternative or vocational placements. There are also sixteen parochial or private schools. The district elementary schools enroll nearly 13,500 students. District middle schools have a total enrollment of more than 7,600, and the high schools enroll more than 8,600 students. During the 1999-2000 school year, the district's public schools served nearly

30,000 students. This represents an increase in enrollment of 4.7 percent from the previous year, primarily in the high school grades. The students within the district are 71 percent Caucasian, 23 percent African American, two percent Asian, two percent Hispanic/Latino, and less than .2 percent Native American, with the remainder comprised of other racial groups.

The district has 4,805 full-time employees, of whom 2,118 are classified and 2,687 are certified. One superintendent and one assistant to the superintendent lead the district, and both are served by a specialized corps of directors in the central office. The district is also governed by the local school board that has five elected members.

Neighborhood

Oakdale Middle School is on the outskirts of the county and is situated on the borders of a neighborhood, a major interstate, a local expressway, and agricultural pastures. The developed area nearest the school is divided into two segments. Immediately surrounding the school is a neighborhood of well-kept, middle-class, single-family homes with large yards. These homes were built nearly forty years ago. There are several moderately sized protestant churches intermingled within these homes. Despite being surrounded by the neighborhood, Oakdale is somewhat isolated from its nearest neighbors by a band of trees, athletic fields, and faculty parking lots. In addition, just beyond this neighborhood is a collection of run down apartments, a large local motel, convenience stores, several small restaurants, some light industry, as well as discount and pawn stores. Few of the students at Oakdale reside in the nicer homes surrounding the school. Instead, the school draws most of its population from the nearby apartment complexes and through busing from the inner-city segments of the district.

Internal Conditions of the School

General Appearance

Oakdale Middle School was recently remodeled and the school facilities are in excellent condition. The grounds on which the school is located were remarkably well kept and free of litter. Large grass fields sit immediately behind the school and are used primarily by physical education classes and school athletic teams. The building has two primary entrances; students use the largest one at the front of the building when unloading and loading from buses. The other, in the rear of the school, offers immediate access to the administrative and guidance offices. During school operating hours these entrances, as well as others, are locked and require individuals to be identified before being admitted to the building.

The halls and classrooms are bright and clean. The building effectively reflects the thrust towards teams in middle schools, and it is divided into grade level and team pods. Each pod holds classrooms for the content area teachers as well as a faculty workroom intended specifically for use by the team teachers. The hallways are painted with vivid colors representing the grade-level teams and school colors in the common areas. Because students spend the majority of their days in their team section, they have easy access to their lockers in the common areas of the pod, and each grade level, comprised of two distinct teams, shares a common restroom and water fountain. This design promotes cohesiveness among the teams and limits the movement of students throughout the building during the day. Displayed within each pod are examples of student work, materials from current units of study, and signs and banners intended to motivate students and build team and school spirit.

In addition to the six team-pods, there are a significant number of classrooms located on the far end of the building that house the special education students. These rooms are well equipped to meet the specific learning needs of the special education students. Also, there are two computer labs, a gymnasium and school media center, well-appointed art, technology, and consumer science classrooms, a cafeteria, guidance and administrative offices, a general faculty workroom, and a family resource, youth service center (FRYSC). Classrooms throughout the school are clean and well lighted. Nearly all classrooms displayed at least one state-issued poster that outlines the core content for the subject of instruction. Additionally, each room is decorated with content specific materials and examples of student work and has a variety of relatively modern instructional technology and manipulative materials. Overall, the appearance of the school is bright, welcoming, modern, and spacious.

Oakdale Faculty

Oakdale has one principal and one assistant principal. The principal and assistant both have considerable longevity at Oakdale. Together these two women have more than 50 years of experience. In addition to these administrators, the school has three guidance counselors. Each counselor is responsible for the students in one grade level. Of these three counselors, one is a school counselor and the others are social workers.

The teaching faculty at Oakdale is both very experienced and well trained. Of the 77 certified teachers, 55 have a Masters degree or beyond, and the average number of years experience is 10.8, with a range from those teachers who have just recently entered the profession up to 31 years of experience. In addition, 96 percent of the teaching faculty is certified, while the remaining four percent have provisional certification.

In addition to the certified faculty at Oakdale, the school also has a full-time receptionist/administrative assistant, an attendance clerk, a FRYSC coordinator and assistant, several custodial workers, and cafeteria staff. Aside from the regular school employees, Oakdale also has opted to have a Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) in the building. Highly Skilled Educators (HSEs) are educators who have been identified and trained by the Kentucky Department of Education to assist schools that have failed to meet their assessment benchmark. During the two years of the study, Oakdale had one HSE for a portion of the first academic year. However, because her tenure ended in the HSE program, another HSE was appointed to the school in her place. The second HSE served for the full academic year 1999-2000.

Oakdale Students

Oakdale serves students in grades six through eight, and offers a variety of learning experiences for these children. For the 1999-2000 school year, Oakdale offered 341 academic class sections. In efforts to compensate for the low reading and writing scores of its students, Oakdale uses its schoolwide Title I status to incorporate an additional period of instruction in reading. Thus, in addition to a language arts class, each student also has a reading class to augment literacy instruction. Students also enroll in grade level mathematics, social studies, and science classes, as well as numerous exploratory elective classes. This offers students a combination of eight classes, forty-five minutes in length, throughout the school year. For core content classes, the average teacher/student ratio was 1 to 23, for special education classes, the ratio was 1 to 6 and the overall average including Title I courses and exploratory classes was 1 to 16.

Of the more than 7,600 middle school students in the district, 71 percent are Caucasian, 24 percent are African American, two percent are Asian, two percent are Hispanic, and the remaining one percent are Native American and other racial groups. In comparison, the racial distribution of students at Oakdale represents a greater percentage of minority students. The Caucasian/White students comprise the majority population, 62.6 percent; the second largest racial/ethnic group of students is African American/Black at 35.4 percent. In addition to these students, there are a small number of Asian, Latino, and other racial minorities within the school. Typically, these other students comprise less than two percent of the total student body. Although during the last eight years the student population has ranged from 741 to 804 students, the racial composition of the school has remained remarkably consistent through this growth.

School Organization

Management and Leadership

The principal at Oakdale began her career in education as a special education teacher in the district. She taught special education for eleven years and later served as a director of special education. These early experiences with special education students have served her well during her tenure at Oakdale, which has a high percentage of special education students. Following these experiences, she continued her career as an assistant principal at another middle school in the district, and has served as the principal of Oakdale for ten years.

The faculty at Oakdale offered nothing but accolades for the principal. She was well-liked and respected among the faculty members and maintained professional yet friendly relationships with faculty and students. Teachers described the principal as capable, supportive, a strong disciplinarian, and as offering real leadership to the school (Teacher interviews 51899S, 10599, and 51799B). Teachers reported that the administration made their jobs easier because of the support provided by the principal and assistant principal.

> Absolutely, I think we have a wonderful administration. It's very open to the staff and to the ideas of the staff...They're very supportive of things we want to try as long as we can tell them why and what we think it will do...She's a very visionary administrator and she knows where she wants us to be down the road. Her whole function as an administrator is to try to facilitate that growth as

> smoothly as possible with the least amount of impact on the staff other than just bringing them up to do what they need to be doing. (Teacher interview 51799F)

Another teacher described the principal in this way: "I see our school as a very strong administrative school. The principal has her hand right on the pulse of the school" (Teacher interview 51899S). The HSE confirmed the influence of the principal's leadership and commented, " I immediately found out that the staff respects the principal tremendously" (HSE interview 51899).

The principal described her leadership of the school and its improvement in the following way:

> The majority of the programs that have been implemented have been at my request and my idea, but the staff is great with buying into them. They know that I'm not going to ask them to work on a program or implement something that hasn't been really thought out. They all know that I'm a thinker and that I always weigh a million different issues before I put in a program. I think I've had a major impact, but it's been through their help. I feel like I work for them. They don't work for me. It's just a little bit of change of philosophy. I'm there for them, and I'm there to encourage them and to try to provide a structured environment in which they can teach and allow them to do what they were hired to do. (Principal interview 51799)

Internal Conflict and Collegiality

Overall, there seemed to be minimal levels of internal conflict at Oakdale. Teachers claimed that they felt supported both by the administration and by other members of their team. Several teachers reported that the school worked as a team and that the majority of their colleagues were working to their full potential. In addition, numerous teachers reported that their opinions were well received and considered during decision-making processes.

When asked to describe their colleagues, Oakdale teachers most frequently mentioned that their colleagues get along well with their students. They also identified them as teachers who could be trusted, hard working, enthusiastic, effective, professional, knowledgeable, doing their jobs, caring, and thoughtful. Oakdale teachers were proud of their colleagues and their contributions to the students and the improvement of their school. These teachers felt that their colleagues were devoted to improvement and were concerned with the students' improvement. One teacher commented, "I think we're really dedicated as a staff and we are willing to go above and beyond what we have to do" (Teacher interview 51799Y), while another claimed that "most of the teachers here give everything they've got and more" (Teacher interview 51799B).

Learning Climate

In the hallways and classrooms, learning appeared to be a priority. The hallways were remarkably quiet and orderly, even during student transitions from class-to-class and during dismissal. In most cases, teachers were involved in instruction and very little classroom time appeared to be wasted on managerial activities or unplanned gaps. The interruptions to classes were minimal both over the PA system and through messengers sent directly to classes. The school had an active hum throughout the school day, but neither the noise nor the level of activity reached the intensity of interfering with instruction.

Of the six classes observed at Oakdale, each classroom was bright and clean. In all but one class, the state content and assessment standards were posted in a prominent location in the room. In one class, those standards that had been met were highlighted as a visual reminder of progress. Five of the six lessons were aligned to the core content which represents the material and skills found on the state assessment. Additionally, each of the teachers demonstrated age-appropriate instructional methods, showed rapport with the students, and maintained classroom behaviors appropriate for classroom activities.

Decision Making

When asked to describe who makes important decisions, many teachers replied that the principal was in control. In addition, some teachers mentioned the school-based decision making (SBDM) council. Regardless of whether they identified the principal or the SBDM council as the decision making authority, teachers felt that their input was a valued component to the process and that their viewpoints were considered. Teachers at Oakdale felt that decision making was democratic, and many attributed this all-inclusive decision making to the leadership of the principal. "I think our administrator tries to be as…diplomatic, democratic as possible and tries to consider everybody's best interest" (Teacher interview 10699N). Other teachers echoed this sentiment. "Everybody can have input… it's just the principal fosters involvement of everyone and everyone…feels very free to contribute" (Teacher interview 10699EC). "I didn't feel left out either because we were always updated and asked for suggestions" (Teacher interview 10699N). Teachers also reported that they felt free to disagree with the administration and the decisions that were made. One teacher reported that the principal had established an outlet for dissent. The principal made strong efforts to maintain open communication with the faculty through face to face discussions as well as written comments.

However, despite mandates to transfer decision making authority to school councils, when asked what role the SBDM council played at Oakdale, one teacher described them only as a source of information. They provide "all the information [the principal] needs before she makes the decision, but again, I really feel the ultimate decision is hers" (Teacher interview 10599). Another teacher echoed the authority of the principal in the decision making process: "I know the principal has the final say in everything and she weighs everything back and forth, but the ultimate decision is really hers" (Teacher interview 10599).

School Challenges

According to the 1998 Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) Performance Report, 99 percent of seventh grade students scored below the proficient level in reading, 97 percent scored below proficient in writing, and 73 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math. Also, using a battery of standardized assessments, an analysis of students entering sixth grade at Oakdale for the 1999-2000 school year showed that 72 percent of students entered below grade level in reading, 75 percent entered below grade level in math, and 18 percent of all students receive special education services. In addition, during the 1999-2000 school year, Oakdale enrolled 75 percent of students in the free and reduced lunch program. This represents a marked shift in student socioeconomic status from the beginning of the decade. In 1989-90, only 24 percent of Oakdale students were eligible for subsidized lunch. This figure jumped to 42 percent in 1990-91, and it has steadily increased over the last ten years.

Aside from an increasing number of special education students and increasing numbers of students performing below grade level and participating in the free and reduced lunch program, one of Oakdale's greatest challenges is the high mobility rate of students. During the 1997-1998 school year, more than 58 percent of the school population changed (i.e. withdrew or enrolled). As the principal explained, during "every 20 instructional days, we lose or gain 40-60 children…and two months ago, we lost and gained 92 in 20 days." This high rate of transience has interfered with teachers' abilities to teach and develop relationships with these children. As one explained:

> I wasn't shocked at all [about the decline in scores] because our population at this school is so transient. Just this year alone with my children, we have some students that have been in and out two and three times… the truancy problem is unreal, worse now than it was, say, four years ago. We have some students that have missed twenty, thirty days, some forty. That in itself keeps those kids from

scoring high because you can't teach them if they're not here." (Teacher interview 51799B)

School Accountability

Assessment Scores

In the first two biennial cycles of Kentucky's accountability system, Oakdale achieved reward status. It was one of the few middle schools in the state to be in rewards in two consecutive cycles. However, the third biennium brought decline to Oakdale. The performance scores for the third biennium fell well below the target level.

Cycle Three Improvement Goal 96-98	Growth Index (Yr. 1 / 96-97)	Growth Index (Yr. 2 / 97-98)	Combined Growth Index 96-98	Accountability Cycle Three Status
48.2	36.6	36.5	36.6	In Decline

For the 1998 KIRIS test, Oakdale's scores fell below the district and state marks.

Seventh Grade

	Reading	Science	Writing
Oakdale	62	31	22
District	70	39	40
State	68	37	39

Eighth Grade

	Math	Social Studies	Arts & Humanities	Practical Living/ Vocational Studies
Oakdale	59	44	29	26
District	78	57	45	39
State	67	51	39	34

Additionally, the 1999 interim scores for Oakdale were not encouraging. Eighty-three percent of Oakdale's writing portfolios were at the novice level, 90 percent of reading scores were at the novice or apprentice level, science scores were 57 percent novice, and social studies were 41 percent novice. However, the school's math scores reflected greater success, with 10 percent scoring at the distinguished level and 15 percent scoring at the proficient level.

Attendance

During the last decade, Oakdale has averaged a yearly attendance rate of 91.6 percent. During these ten years, annual attendance has ranged from 87.7 percent to 92.3 percent. For the 1999-2000 school year, the school had an overall attendance rate of 91 percent. This is somewhat lower than the district-wide rate of 93.6 percent and the statewide attendance rate of 94 percent.

Discipline

Oakdale's administration prides itself on consistent enforcement of school rules and regulations. The teachers describe the school as orderly, organized, and structured, and they believe that they are supported by the administration in the disciplining of students. However, it is not that there is an absence of misbehavior at Oakdale, but rather a rigid enforcement of rules that creates an orderly environment.

Dealing with Accountability

Educators' Reactions

The teachers at Oakdale openly shared their feelings about their school being labeled as a school in decline. Teachers spoke of a multitude of emotions surrounding their accountability status – disappointment, personal failure, denial, embarrassment, confidence, anxiety, and fear. Although most agreed that they were capable of improving their school, the burden of being classified as a school in decline was evident. Several Oakdale teachers commented that their reputation had been tarnished and that working at Oakdale was sometimes an embarrassment because of its reputation within the community. One teacher described her feelings this way: "very demoralized. I felt really down. I felt like everyone would think that I was a failure and a bad teacher because I feel that's where all of the accountability is" (Teacher interview 51799G). Another teacher echoed this sentiment.

> I've never been a failure at things I've done... It's not a very good feeling when you have to tell someone where you work and they say, "Oh, *that* school. That's a bad school. What are you doing wrong?" When they really don't understand, so I would really like to see our scores come up so you don't feel bad about yourself every day. (Teacher interview 51799G)

Many teachers at Oakdale took their status personally. Many questioned their own teaching abilities and evaluated their role in the fallen scores.

> I was disappointed of course... I had questions with all that as far as my teaching and wondering if there were some things that I could have done that may have helped students lean more, to be better prepared for the test, or if there was something that I did do that has a backward effect or negative effect. (Teacher interview 51899J)

Another teacher shared similar feelings, "You feel like, 'Okay if I don't help them raise their scores, this is all going to come down on me" (Teacher interview 10699N). However, there were teachers who did not assume personal responsibility for their status. "We were a school in decline and therefore our staff kind of looked bad because we didn't seem to be helping the students and it was just a bad misconception... I was doing the best that I could with the students I had" (Teacher interview 10599S).

Despite the school's in-decline status, not all teachers and administrators expressed negative feelings. Several revealed a positive outlook on their abilities to succeed and on their school in general. One teacher commented, "We have some very capable teachers that are working very hard, going the extra mile, staying late after school, coming in early in the mornings, and spending the extra time that they never get compensated for, and yet they are here and they do their job and they do it well" (Teacher interview 51899S). Another teacher repeated these sentiments and claimed, "I think we have a great school. I feel really positive about our school. I think our staff works as hard or harder than any staff in the district" (Teacher interview 51799F). Although these teachers were notably positive about Oakdale and their teaching abilities, overall, the status of being in-decline had negative effects on the morale of teachers and on the school climate. As one teacher explained, "I wouldn't say we've benefited from being in decline...There's obviously been a lot of negative publicity. There has been a lot of pressure" (Teacher interview 10699EC). In most cases, teachers claimed that they were not surprised by their decline status. "We knew that it was coming. You can't have a third of your sixth grade class coming in every year on a first or second grade level and not realize that eventually it's going to catch up with you" (Teacher interview 51799Y). The principal echoed this lack of surprise in the declining test scores. "My only shock was that we didn't fall further than what I had anticipated" (Principal interview 51799T).

Some teachers admitted feeling that the system was not fair to teachers in schools with populations similar to Oakdale. "They're holding a teacher accountable, and they never understand the type of students that you have, and that's not fair" (Teacher interview 51899S). In addition to the absence of consideration for lack of parental support at the school and the large percentages of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program, another teacher noted that it was also unfair for the system to hold teachers accountable for student performance. "It's on the teachers. There's no involvement. There's no parental accountability, there's no student accountability, it's basically the teachers and the staff that's supposedly the problem" (Teacher interview 51799G).

Plans to Leave or Stay at the School

In most cases, the poor performance on the KIRIS test had not interfered with teacher commitment at Oakdale. Many reported that they had no intentions of leaving the school. Teachers claimed that they enjoyed the challenge of the students at Oakdale, and that they felt needed by the administration and by the students (Teacher interviews 51799F and 51899S). Nearly all of the teachers at Oakdale were committed to seeing their school improve and their reputation restored to its previous level. One teacher explained her commitment in this way, "I like the school and I feel compelled to stay here. I feel there's an obligation that I have somehow to try to help pull us out" (Teacher interview 10599S). Another revealed her true devotion to her job and her school.

> I love teaching here and wouldn't teach anywhere else because the teachers are very professional and very dedicated. The administration is very supportive and very encouraging and treats you as professionals... Some people would prefer to work in a school that had more higher-level students, but to me that 's never been the issue. All students have needs. (Teacher interview 51799NC)

Several teachers were quick to voice that while they had other options available to them, their choice to stay at Oakdale. "I had my choice of schools [in this county] and I came here because of the kind of kids we have and the principal"(Teacher interview 51799Y). Another teacher used her colleagues' devotion to Oakdale as an indication of the loyalty and commitment the faculty had to improving the school. "There are teachers that can transfer to other schools and choose not to because they're really dedicated to what we do here." (Teacher interview 51799NC)

However, one teacher admitted that he might be happier at another school. "The other schools in this county don't have the same type of children that we have and they're successful because of that. If I were at another school where the students have those advantages and education was important. I wouldn't have the problems that I have here" (Teacher interview 51799G).

Nearly all of the teachers who responded to the survey (94 percent) claimed that they were often or almost always satisfied with their job at Oakdale, and twenty-four of the thirty four respondents indicated that they were committed to staying at Oakdale. These teachers reported that they liked their jobs because of the administration, their colleagues, the feeling that they will be able to prove themselves better than their reputation, and that they have a great hope for the school to improve. However, they attributed feelings of dissatisfaction with their job to feeling unappreciated by the community, and they were tired of the additional pressure put on them due to their accountability status.

Steps Taken in Response to Decline

Teachers reported that their accountability status had affected their work at Oakdale. They have worked to alter their performance by "looking at where the areas of discrepancy were and comparing them to the program that we have in place and why what we're doing is not affecting those areas and trying to find ways to bring things into play that will affect those areas" (Teacher interview 51799F). Teachers admitted that they recognized the challenges ahead of them and were willing to put forth the additional effort needed to improve the school. "We still have a lot of things we need to [do], but you can't do it all at once. If the kids can't read, write, and do math, they aren't going to do well with any other subject area" (Teacher interview 51799F).

Oakdale has outlined their plan for improvement through their state mandated school improvement plan. Within the plan, they have developed focused goals. These include improvement of reading, writing, and math scores, and the improvement of school climate. In order to meet these goals, Oakdale teachers and administrators recommended several changes to their current practices. One of their first priorities to reach these goals is to align their curriculum to the state Core Content. Because the Kentucky Education Reform (KERA) outlined very specific concepts that students should know, schools throughout the state have worked to align their curriculum to these guidelines. This assures that students are being exposed to the skills and concepts that will be assessed on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) test. The Oakdale school improvement plan also included a strategy to identify any student performing three years below grade level to provide intense remediation for these students. Oakdale also planned to hire additional staff to provide more individual attention to students, and they also included strategies to integrate writing throughout the curriculum. Again, consistent with the demands of the state assessment, the improvement of student writing skills is critical to raising CATS scores. Thus, the inclusion of open response questions and portfolio entries throughout the curriculum insures frequent writing practice in preparation for the assessment. To maximize the effects of the added writing practice, Oakdale hired part-time writing coaches to work with students individually in improving their writing. Oakdale's plan also included provisions for professional development, increased instructional time for math, and numerous other strategies intended to raise CATS scores.

One of the most notable strategies taken by the teachers at Oakdale has been the implementation of an additional reading instruction course for all students. Oakdale teachers made frequent comments concerning their students' below-grade-level reading ability. The faculty agreed that these reading difficulties were undermining many of their efforts for improvement, and in order to remedy their students' poor reading skills, literacy became the school's primary concern. In its efforts to promote literacy, Oakdale utilized their school-wide

Title I teachers to offer each student a daily reading course in addition to their regular language arts classes. This additional reading instruction period groups students into smaller classes according to their abilities to promote individual attention on levels appropriate to the students' needs. The Accelerated Reader program has been incorporated into this additional reading class as a component of the instruction. Thus, during each school day, students participate in two separate classes that focus on reading and written expression. The intent of this new program was to address students' remedial reading needs to improve their performance in all academic areas.

Another important response has been the presence of the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) at Oakdale. HSEs (originally named Distinguished Educators or DEs) are available to schools falling below their accountability benchmark. These Highly Skilled Educators have been trained by the Kentucky Department of Education to work with schools to raise their assessment scores. The HSE at Oakdale spent a considerable amount of time at the school each week. She reported that she assisted teachers with any difficulties they were having with their students or instruction. She modeled instruction for teachers to suggest techniques for aligning their teaching with the state curriculum. Additionally, she analyzed the school's consolidated plan, and discussed topics that were absent from the plan with teachers and administrators. She described her role "as a change agent to get people to think about and just trying to plant the seed" (HSE Interview 51899). For the HSE, the biggest change at Oakdale since her arrival was that teachers now paid attention to state guidelines. Regarding this fact, she commented:

> Teachers didn't pay much attention to even the state doctrines such as core content, programs of studies. They didn't know the difference between the two, they didn't know what was there, they didn't think their students could perform at that level, so I think they just ignored them. I guess one of the big improvements that I'm starting to see is probably that about 60-70 percent of the teachers are at least looking at the state documents, discussing the state documents and talking

> about what they should be teaching kids. That to me is an improvement. (HSE Interview 51899)

One teacher described the HSE in this way:

> We have our Distinguished Educator here. She's done a lot I think. There was probably some resistance to having someone come in, but I think the way she comes across is kind of easy to relate to. I think a lot of the staff have a trusting relationship with her now. So we had a DE come in and work with us in a lot of different areas. (Teacher interview 51899J)

However, although each of the teachers who responded to the survey included the presence of the HSE as a strategy that had been implemented in response to being in decline, only half of these teachers responded that they had any sustained contact with the HSE assigned to Oakdale. The HSE confirmed this by commenting that of the nearly eighty teachers, there were only "ten to fifteen teachers that I'm in regular contact with" (HSE Interview 51899). Additionally, although many teachers appreciated the assistance provided by the HSE, when asked to speculate about the HSE leaving Oakdale, one teacher commented, "I don't think it would make any difference" (Teacher interview 10599).

In addition to these strategies, several teachers commented on increased professional development opportunities. "I hate to keep saying this, but professional development hours, but a lot of what she does because 'Well, this worked somewhere, lets try it...If it's going to work for two or three kids, that's two or three kids more that we've saved as opposed to letting them slip by'" (Teacher interview 51799Y). Several teachers explained that they were always looking for new methods, techniques, or instructional materials that might benefit any or all of their students. The HSE explained their focus on professional development in improving the school. "We've done a lot of looking where they are, where do they need to go, and we've done extensive work on planning professional development for the next two to three years" (HSE Interview 51899). Teachers at Oakdale were conscientious of their teaching and were diligent about attending conferences or workshops to explore instructional programs or innovations that may have benefited their school.

Most of the teachers at Oakdale were confident in their teaching abilities and felt prepared for the tasks before them. They spoke of numerous programs and changes they had implemented in efforts to improve their instruction and their school. These teachers were proud of the number of innovations that they had in place to benefit the students. "We have more things in place to address more concerns than just about anybody" (Teacher interview 51799F). They also felt they were working harder following being identified as a school in decline. Also, as noted by the principal, Oakdale has also implemented a wide variety of programs targeted to special education students and also to those students with inappropriate social behavior as well as students who are over-aged for their grade level. She commented:

> We've implemented a lot of programs here to try to correct some of the deficit areas hoping that by breaking down the novice areas we would at least receive some credit from those children who were coming in and within a year we were improving… We don't' basically make the child fit our program. We try to have our programs fit the needs of the children. (Principal interview 51799)

Each teacher identified several innovations that had been adopted and implemented to improve student achievement and behavior. They proudly referred to these programs and their impact on their students. Most teachers agreed that they could affect student achievement and make a difference in their school with additional effort. They reported being willing to put forth the needed effort and believed themselves and their colleagues to be capable of improving their school. Teachers reported that their greatest area of success was working with individual students to analyze their weaknesses. According to one teacher, "We do a very good job at recognizing and analyzing the needs that students have and getting those needs met" (Teacher interview 51799NC). Another teacher agreed that this was a strength of the faculty.

> We are becoming more focused. I think we've always been aware of skill deficits, but I think we're becoming more focused on identifying specific skill areas rather than just teaching reading...We can better identify where those skill deficits are and not re-teach everybody because somebody has a problem. (Teacher interview 51799F).

They also felt that they were successful in communicating their genuine concern for their students' well being and academic progress. These educators noted that they and their students had been affected by the changes.

> I'm sure that our children have benefited from the increased effort of the teachers. It is not a comfortable feeling to have the whole community talk about you being in decline, but I think it does push you toward trying to incorporate all of the different aspects of these achievement goals. (Teacher interview 10699HE)

Teachers at Oakdale agreed that many of these programs and interventions were not in response to their accountability status, but were in place prior to their decline. As explained by the principal, "We had anticipated the change two years ago..." (Principal interview 51799). The faculty at Oakdale claimed that because of the population shift brought about by the onset of the district's magnet program, they were prepared for their drop in scores. Many Oakdale teachers commented that they responded to their population shift and their subsequent drop in scores prior to being named a school in decline. "I don't' think that we've been reactive, I think we've been very proactive. We are increasing training in things like reading and writing skills, but that's because of needs that were already recognized" (Teacher interview 51799NC). "If there's something out there, we've tried it. So we've been doing that forever and we're still doing that" (Teacher interview 51799Y).

Importance of Standards/Increasing the School's CATS Scores

When asked to identify indicators used to evaluate their success, Oakdale teachers ranked the state assessment (KIRIS/CATS) below six other measures. Those teachers who responded to the survey most commonly named "answers from individual students" as the most important indicator of their success. Additionally, they mentioned lively participation, student completion of tasks, high scores on classroom tests, praise from principals, and positive comments from parents as a more important indicators than student success on the KIRIS and CATS tests. Many teachers reported that the assessment was too hard and unfair for poor schools. They also felt that the state's expectations for success were unrealistic for their students.

Several teachers readily voiced their opinion that the assessment scores were not their sole motivation for working at Oakdale. Instead, several reflected on the importance of learning and individual student accomplishments and improvement. For the Oakdale faculty, the test was not necessarily the gauge they used to measure student learning or improvement. "It's important to me, but I'm more concerned about the students' overall learning" noted one teacher (Teacher interview 51899J). As the principal explained, "I'm not worried about whether they're going to read at the eighth grade level tomorrow or not. I want to know if they're improving. Are they continuing to improve? Are they feeling good about what they do? Are they more employable? Those are the things that concern me" (Principal interview 51799). This sentiment was echoed numerous times from multiple teachers. "It's important, but it's not... I think sometimes with a lot of the kids we have here, some of those test scores aren't the most important thing...Yes, I want the test scores to come up so that we're not being punished or being looked down upon, but it's more important that I'd rather teach those kids life things" (Teacher interview 51799B). Another explained, "I'm not as worried about... what the state says should be the performance level. As long as I see improvement"(Teacher interview 10699N).

However, despite their lack of success, and the low priority for many teachers, Oakdale teachers did have a desire to raise their CATS scores. "I think it's important. I think it's very important. We want our kids to be competitive. We want our kids to have life skills. We have no choice. It's not a matter of meeting district standards, even though that's important. It's just a matter of accomplishing what has to be accomplished" (Teacher interview 51799F).

Special Education

In response to the accountability system and to the district magnet school program, Oakdale teachers and administrators emphasized the increasing population of special education students in the school. The number of special education students at Oakdale has shown a remarkable increase during the last decade. In the 1991-1992 school year, Oakdale had 8.8 percent of its students receiving special education services. During the years 1992-1998, this number increased, hovering around 15 percent. However, by the 1998-1999 school year the figure had risen to 17.6 percent and by 1999-2000 it had increased to 17.9 percent. Thus, in the years from 1991 to 2000, the number of students identified as requiring special education services has doubled. Of note is the fact that these percentages do not include those students with 504 or remedial education plans. It is also interesting to note that the other middle schools within the district report an average special education population of just 10 percent, which is also the state average for middle schools. Further reinforcing this segregation are the percentages of students served by gifted and talented programs. While Oakdale reports that approximately 5 percent of its students benefit from this program, the district reports nearly 20 percent and the state reports 14 percent of its entire student population participates in these program.

The Oakdale faculty noted that this large percentage of special education students has interfered with their ability to compete effectively with the other schools in the district and to improve on the KIRIS/CATS assessment. One teacher commented, "When you have the number of special education classes that we have here at this school, which is double to triple of any other school here in this county, I don't see that we have declined really...We're not a magnet school, and yet we are a magnet school for special education (Teacher interview 51899S).

Another teacher reinforced this view:

> Our school is a very different school from any in this state, I'd say as far as overloading with the special education students. In fact [the principal] asked the state even to show us another school that is similar to ours where we could go and study them if they are not in decline as well. Nobody within the state or anybody else has been able to point one out to us. So this school is quite different from any others" (Teacher interview 51899S).

The principal corroborated this story on several occasions, and mentioned that she was waiting for someone from the state to show her an example of another school with circumstances similar to Oakdale that was successful (Principal interview 51799).

Blaming the District

In many cases, Oakdale faculty blamed district policies for their increasing special education population and for their decline. In the early 1990s, the district began utilizing the magnet school concept to draw students to certain focus areas, to offer parental choice with regards to their children's educational needs or preferences, and to address district-wide equity issues. Oakdale is not one of the district's magnet schools, and many teachers resent these schools for attracting the brightest students and leaving the remaining pool to be distributed among the non-magnet middle schools. One teacher described the situation in the following manner:

> What seems to be happening here is that the students who don't get into magnet programs or who aren't allowed or who would get kicked out of magnet programs, get brought to our school and the students, the higher level students, who would normally come to our school often times go to magnet programs... We're very bottom heavy (Teacher interview 51799NC).

Another teacher commented, "We have nobody at the top to bring the scores up...Why can't we be districted so that we get a wider variety of kids instead of the lower end of the totem pole and all the special ed kids?...I think we're just tired of being the dumping ground for this county" (Teacher interview 10599S). Yet another teacher claimed these shifts led to other schools' success at Oakdale's expense. "The other schools in this county don't have the same type of children that we have and they're successful because of that" (Teacher interview 51799G).

As one teacher explained, the magnet program has taken those students who were performing at grade level and left those who were not capable of being accepted into the magnet program. "Within the past four or five years, you had the institution of magnet schools which drew your top kids off. You had changing of attendance, so we're getting a much higher population that are not reading at grade level" (Teacher interview 10699EC).

Nearly every teacher at Oakdale who participated in this study echoed this sentiment. One sixth grade teacher described her job as preparing students "who were second grade readers and second grade writers to be ready to go to the seventh grade" (Teacher interview 51799Y). The absence of students who perform at grade level was repeated on numerous occasions.

> Well, we're getting students in on such a low level of learning anymore. I mean they're coming in with first and second grade reading levels that you can't teach the curriculum that is designed to be taught at middle schools to those students, so we're having to drop down and try and teach them the material, but at a much lower level, but at the same time we're required to prepare them for the test and have them at sixth grade level at the end of the year...We need professional development to teach us how to get students from a second grade level to perform on a sixth grade level from September to April. (Teacher interview 51799G)

The principal echoed this frustration.

> I have yet to find anybody that can show me someone who can do what they're asking me to do...I've asked people from the state...Just show me someone who can take a child from low novice to an apprentice in a year and send me there and I'll be glad to watch what they do. (Principal interview 51799)

In comparison to the other middle schools within the district, Oakdale's students score far below the county average, and considerably below those schools with magnet programs. In 1999-2000, for all middle schools within the district, 46.3 percent of all eighth grade students scored at or above grade level in Math. Oakdale had only 26.4 percent of its eighth graders at grade level, while the district's two premier magnet schools had 85.2 percent and 72.9 percent. Only one other middle school had more students below grade level than Oakdale. Similar to the results for eighth grade, the district had 40.8 percent of sixth grade students performing at or above grade level in mathematics. Oakdale had 23.8 percent, again with only one middle school scoring lower. As with eighth grade, the two magnet schools had 71.7 percent and 70.8 percent of students at or above grade level. Clearly, there are discrepancies between the students' scores at the magnet and non-magnet schools. The principal expressed frustration with this stark difference in student population among middle schools in the district. "Our teachers are asked to do a job that a lot of middle schools aren't…and I have yet to find anybody that can show me someone who can do what they're asking me to do" (Principal interview 51799).

We ARE Making Progress

Despite the low scores, and in the midst of the large number of students who failed to perform at grade level, the faculty at Oakdale reports that they are making progress with individual students. Many teachers commented that students are making academic progress, despite their inability to perform at grade level.

> The programs are in place and they were working and we were making progress, but when you get kids in the sixth grade who are reading on the first grade level and you bring them up to a third grade level by the end of the year, they've gone up two grade levels, but the state doesn't see that as an improvement. I mean we might have to become more determined to show them that, but we can only do so much when our kids come in so low. (Teacher interview 10599)

Another teacher commented, "We have a lot of successes that don't get noticed" (Teacher interview 10699HE). Yet another teacher put it this way: "We were misunderstood because we were being compared to a standard and I feel that our teachers and staff here, we do the best we can with what we've got and what students we have. We see some students' improvements, but they're not big enough to go on a scale for testing" (Teacher interview 10599S).

Teachers at Oakdale report that one of their strengths is removing the focus on where the student is supposed to be and working on individual improvement for each student. "I think we do a really good job with the student, taking the student where he is and advancing that student" (Teacher interview 51899S). The principal also complimented the work of the faculty at Oakdale and the improvements they were able to make with students despite their low scores on the state achievement test. She told the story of a sixth grader who had recently read his first book. She proudly spoke of the progress that Oakdale's teachers were making with their students.

> I'm very satisfied with what I'm doing, with what the teachers are doing and the progress of the children…We're taking children who are second, third, and fourth grade readers and trying to get them to understand, comprehend and write about sixth, seventh and eighth grade content…It's just that success in our eyes is not what the state wants. If we can improve a kid six months in the one year that they've been here and in six years they've only been able to perform at a first grade level. Then we've done something more there than what anybody has done in their first six years of education. You can't tell me that we're not successful. It just doesn't show in our scores, but that is success. It's like you're doing great and you're improving. You're doing something more than what anybody did in this child's educational experience, and now they're going to punish you because of it. (Principal interview 51799)

Most of the teachers at Oakdale agreed that they were making progress with their student and felt that their efforts were going unrecognized. Their comments about the absence of recognition show their frustration with the accountability system and its validity as an assessment. "Sometimes outsiders don't understand the difficulties that we're working with and they may label us as 'Oh, they're a school in decline,' but they really don't understand how much work we put into it… We have a lot of successes that don't get noticed" (Teacher interview 10699HE). Other teachers explained "I think we work twice as hard as anybody else to move our kids in great leaps, but it's still not good enough." and "I felt really bad because I see what a lot of people are doing here and the difference that they're making and it's not always measurable on the test scores" (Teacher interviews 51799Y and 51799F).

Oakdale's first HSE saw this sentiment as an impediment to making progress on the state assessment. She commented:

> I think that their mindset here is that they're making gains with these students, they're not making the gains the state wants, but they're making gains and they're doing the best they can…They think these students are so below grade level that they will never be able to perform to the state's standards. To me, the first thing they've go to do is change their mindset. (HSE Interview 51899)

One teacher shared the HSE's concern. "If you're working with a lot of kids that have a lot of skill deficit, it's really hard to push and maintain and keep things where they need to be, so I think that we have to be constantly aware of not dumbing down our curriculum" (Teacher interview 51799F).

Summary

Despite their performances on state accountability measures, Oakdale Middle School creates the impression of a good school. It is clean, modern, and well-maintained. Curricular materials are current and readily available. Teachers and administrators are actively involved in improving the educational program of the school. Instruction is on going, well planned, and aligned to the state Core Content. Teachers, administrators, and students enjoy their school and are committed to its success. And yet, it remains at the bottom of the state accountability system. It battles against high mobility and truancy, large special education populations and students from lower socioeconomic conditions, and despite the facilities and hard work, students are not succeeding on the state assessment. Although Oakdale faces numerable obstacles, the principal and teachers are committed to proving themselves capable of overcoming these barriers.

STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL

by Margaret Quintero

External Conditions of the School

Located in the state's most populous county, Stevens Middle School reflects the urban character of the district. The county boasts a population of nearly 700,000 with more than 450,000of those people living outside of the city limits. Within the city, there is one large university and several smaller universities, colleges and a community college. The metro area also has a variety of collegiate and professional athletic events and an array of cultural attractions available to its residents and tourists.

The city has enjoyed a relatively low unemployment rate for an urban area. During the last decade, unemployment peaked at 5.9 percent in 1991, but has since declined reaching a low of 3.0 percent in 1998. This is considerably lower than the statewide unemployment rate of 4.2 percent and the overall rate for the U.S., also 4.2 percent. Within the metro area, there are more than 100,000 recipients of social security/welfare benefits and nearly 100,000 retired workers. In addition, aside from nearly all residents being employed, many are also well educated. Of the persons who are older than 25, more than 74 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent and nearly 20 percent are college graduates. Within the metro area, the per capita income is $22,000, and 64 percent of all available housing units are owner occupied.

The District

The county's school district is the 26th largest in the United States. In the entire district educational program (infant through adult), 95,462 students are enrolled. Of those, 92,000 are enrolled in Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Remarkably, this enrollment has remained nearly unchanged over the last seven years when the district served 95,495 students and only a moderate increase from the beginning of the decade when enrollments measured 92, 638. The district has 87 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, 20 high schools, and numerous other alternative learning settings. The district boasts an average per pupil expenditure of nearly $5,800. In addition to the county schools, there are also more than 50 private, parochial or religiously affiliated schools, as well as the state school for the blind.

The racial composition of the students (grades K-12) in the district is noticeably different from the racial composition of students throughout the state, especially the ratio of Caucasian to African American students. Within this district 63.4 percent are Caucasian/White, 32.5 percent African American, and 4.1 percent other racial/ethnic groups. On the state level, 88.9 percent are Caucasian/White, 10.0 percent African American, with the remainder being other racial/ethnic groups. Thus, in a predominately Caucasian state this urban center has a considerable number of students from other racial/ethnic heritages.

One superintendent and a cadre of deputy superintendents lead the district. In addition, unlike all other districts within Kentucky, which have school boards of five members, this district is governed by a seven-member school board. There are more than 5,500 teachers employed in the district, all of whom are certified, and more than 83 percent of these teachers have a Master's degree or beyond. Overall, the schools in this district enjoy a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 17.

The Neighborhood

Stevens Middle School is located in the southern corner of the county. The school is located within five minutes drive from the city's international airport and from access to the expressway that encircles the city. The neighborhood surrounding the school represents an eclectic mix of urban development. Although varied in composition, all of the areas surrounding the school are older homes and businesses. Within a mile radius of the school, there are pockets of old run-down apartments and convenience stores, grand homes that have been restored, and well-kept smaller homes. In its immediate vicinity, the school is bordered by a neighborhood of older middle class homes. These homes are primarily single-family residences and are well maintained. However, very few of the students at Stevens reside in these homes. Instead, Stevens draws most of its population through busing from the inner city.

Internal Conditions of the School

General appearance

Although there have been more recent additions to accommodate the growing numbers of students, the original building that houses Stevens Middle School was built more than seventy-five years ago. The two-story beige brick building has detailed stonework adorning the architecture and oversized windows on its face which reflect the period during which the original school was built. The yard surrounding the school is relatively clean, but there are large areas where the grass covering has been worn away leaving only dirt behind. The trees and shrubs surrounding the perimeter of the building are large and overgrown.

The school interior also reflects historical architecture with two grand curved staircases joining the first and second floors and dark wooden trim throughout the building. Also, throughout the original section of the building, the ceilings reach between 10 to 12 feet and extend beyond that in some locations. In addition, the building houses an elaborate school auditorium with rows of individual wooden chairs and a broad stage fitted with a heavy velvet curtain. However, from its early grandeur, the school has fallen into a state of disrepair. The downstairs hallways are somewhat dark and there are many places throughout the school in need of attention. Most noticeably, one stairwell shows remarkable water damage and numerous areas need significant plaster repair and repainting. The paint on the nearly all of the windows is chipped or absent, and many places on the ceilings give evidence of past water damage. Despite the state of disrepair throughout the school, the building is relatively clean. The hallways have numerous displays of student work and art pieces. There are subject specific bulletin boards as well as several displays central to the various grade level teams. The library and cafeteria are newer additions and are bright, clean, and well maintained. The library has shelves filled with books and numerous stations with up-to-date computers. The classrooms in the building are quite spacious, but they also were in need of maintenance and cleaning. In each room there were content specific posters and posters defining the state expectations for performance. Some sections of the building were compatible with the middle school teams and held clusters of teachers and students. However, most of the classrooms were randomly placed throughout the building. The bathrooms in the newer sections of the building were clean, well lit, and modern. However, those in the original building were out-dated and offered inadequate privacy for students choosing to use those facilities. With a considerable investment, the school could be restored into a beautiful historic landmark for the neighborhood and the school district.

Stevens faculty

Stevens employs four administrators and 63 certified teachers. In addition to these certified personnel, Stevens also employs a considerable number of secretarial staff, custodial and cafeteria workers. Of these 63 teachers, one-fourth have between 1 to 10 years of experience, one-half have 10 to 15 years experience, and the remaining one-fourth have 16 or more years of experience. The principal also has a great deal of experience in education. He has been working within the district for more than twenty years and has been an administrator at Stevens for 10 years. Thirty-four teachers have a Master's degree or additional levels of certification. In addition, 25 percent of the teaching faculty is African American, including the principal, and the remaining three-fourths are Caucasian. Nearly all teachers at Stevens are certified in their field, however three have emergency certification and one teaching position is filled with a long-term substitute. Overall, the teacher/student ratio is 1 to 25.

Stevens students

The district's minority student population is significantly different from the statewide average. However, the differences are more apparent among the students at Stevens. Stevens serves nearly 900 students in grades six through eight, and of these students, 53 percent are Caucasian/White and the remaining 47 percent are African American/Black. Thus in comparison to the state and district averages, Stevens' population is much more racially diverse.

School Challenges

Stevens Middle School is faced with numerous daily challenges in educating its students. The faculty must address issues of high poverty, student failure, truancy, high percentages of special education students, discipline problems and the negative reputation of the school. Clearly, Stevens confronts immense obstacles in their efforts to improve student achievement.

During the 1998-1999 school year, 11.11 percent of Stevens's students were retained at grade level. Teachers reported that most students arriving at Stevens were not performing at grade level. They reported that only about ten percent of the population is prepared for middle school. "To be quite honest, when kids are starting out at a third grade level and being tested on sixth and seventh, even if you make a year of progress, which some of our kids do, they're still testing them why above what they can even accomplish. I think kids are getting really tired of being told that they don't met any goal at all" (Teacher Interview 51099C2).

In addition to the staggering lack of academic success, the school is also challenged by dire socioeconomic circumstances – eighty percent of students at Stevens participate in the free and reduced lunch program. The faculty agreed that one of the biggest issues faced by Stevens was that "The kids truly know that we are at the bottom and I think that has a lot to do with student morale" (Teacher Interview 51099C2). Teachers complained that the reputation of the school and the students and parents lack of interest in education is a perpetual barrier to their success and improvement. "We have these high expectations for them and I found out for some of them to even be in school is a major accomplishment for the day…Education is not the top priority with a lot of these kids because there are issues in their lives that they're dealing with every day" (Teacher Interview 51099D). "They [the parents] didn't value education when they were growing up and it's carried over to their kids, and so when they look at schools, school is a place where they send their kids" (Teacher Interview 51099R).

Discipline

According to several faculty accounts, student behavior has been improving over the last several years, but discipline problems continue to be a major impediment to improvement (Teacher interviews 51199L, 51199N, 51099C2). In the past three years, Stevens had an average of 787 suspensions each year. Stevens has three associate principals who are primarily charged with managing school discipline, and the head principal also devotes considerable effort to disciplinary issues and spends a great deal of time walking through the halls, interacting with students, and monitoring their behavior. "The principal does his best to keep the peace and to keep the kids in order...We have three assistant principals this year, and that has helped enormously because we have so many discipline problems" (Teacher interview 51199).

In recent years, Stevens adopted a dress code followed by all students. Students are required to wear uniforms reflecting the schools colors, and the principal and teachers report that this has made a drastic improvement on discipline within the school. In classrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria most students were well behaved and were acting in accordance to the expectations demanded by the teacher or supervisor. While classes were in session, the hallways were relatively empty, and aside from the classical music flowing from the PA system, quiet. However, as students moved from one class to another, the noise, at times, became extreme.

Despite the recognized improvement in discipline during the past years, teachers still claimed that discipline was the greatest factor interfering with student success. "We have quite a few discipline problems here so the assistant principals and the principal keep their hands full" (Teacher interview 51299). Several teachers felt that discipline concerns interfered with their classroom instruction. "It's difficult time to time to conduct your class with always correcting somebody or having to get somebody straightened out just to participate" (Teacher interview 51199N). Another teacher commented that, "there are students that need to be dealt with that are just chronic, consistent problems that should not be allowed to come to school basically to interrupt everybody else" (Teacher Interview 51199L).

Although teachers were vocal about the influence of discipline problems on the school, they reported that overall they felt much safer at Stevens than in previous years. One teacher claimed that "the school is a lot safer today than it was five years ago. I mean major safer...Uniforms have helped tremendously because we had a lot of gang stuff and stuff brought in...We got the security cameras and that's helped quite a bit because then you can identify where there are problems, spot it right away from the office…In a safer environment, the kids can learn. If it's not safe, the kids are afraid to even be here" (Teacher Interview 51299W).

Special Education

Among middle schools in the district, Stevens has the second largest percentage of special education students. Over the course of the past four years, the percentages of special education students have risen steadily from 14.2 percent to 19.8 percent. The high numbers of special education students at Stevens represents quite a discrepancy from district middle schools which, during the same time span, saw an average increase of special education students from 11.0 percent to 12.5 percent (Perry, 1999).

Mobility and Truancy

Aside from remarkably low attendance, Stevens also confronts staggering rates of student mobility. Teachers reported that students frequently left and later re-enrolled. "You get very frustrated when you have a student that comes back, in and out, in and out like that. You can't really have any coherent learning. These students get lost in the cracks, in the shuffle" (Teacher Interview 51299W). This sentiment was echoed other teachers, "we have a lot of student mobility…we do get kids who you'll have for six weeks and they'll be gone for six weeks. They'll come back and they may leave again"(Teacher Interview 51099C2). "Out of the sixty students who were here for the first day, I probably have 25 to 30 that are already gone. They leave. They leave and come back, leave and come back" (Teacher Interview 51099R). Teachers attributed this mobility crisis to the socioeconomic level of the students. They explained that parents were frequently evicted from their homes and would move from neighborhood to neighborhood without regard for their child's enrollment in school.

School Organization

Management and leadership

One principal, three assistant principals, and several curriculum and instruction specialists lead Stevens Middle School. In addition to the site-based council, these administrators form the leadership team of the school and meet together regularly with the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) and district resource personnel. The HSE described the weekly meetings of the school leadership team as a discussion of "what each of us are doing in the building to tie it together to give some continuity to what is happening in the building" (HSE Interview).

The principal at Stevens has more than 20 years of experience in education all within schools in the district. He began his career as a school counselor, and was an assistant principal for several years prior to moving to Stevens, where he has been the principal for the past 10 years. Among the faculty at Stevens, the division between supporters and opponents of the school administration and the principal was evident. There were numerous accolades for the work done by the head principal at Stevens. Teachers commented on his willingness to do whatever was necessary to make the school function. Many claimed that they felt supported and cared for by their administration. According to one teacher, "he is absolutely wonderful. He does way beyond what principals are supposed to do" (Teacher Interview 51499B). Another commented that he was "really flexible, he's really good about listening to things that you want to do. If it sounds good, he'll say to try it and he'll look at it, and if it seems to be working, he'll work with you on that" (Teacher Interview 51299M). The Highly Skilled Educator working at Stevens also complemented the principal on the work that he had been doing to improve discipline and security at the school. "The kids have to be safe and this is a safe school. That's because of a lot of work and effort that's been done under the principal's leadership" (HSE Interview).

However, aside from these supporters, there were teachers who criticized the principal and his leadership in the daily functioning of the school. Contrary to his supporters, these teachers felt unsupported and noted an absence of leadership in the school. "The administration has not backed us up or has different things to happen. I've had times when students have done down to administration to complain and the administration has reversed my decision without consulting me and really undercut what I've tried to do in the classroom instead of helped me" (Teacher Interview 51199L). These teachers felt that the school lacked good leadership and that certain cases were not handled properly. "We have a lot of situations that have come up where we don't handle them the way I think we should handle them and I'm not the only one. I think there are other people in this building that feel the same way" (Teacher interview 51099R). Another teacher described her principal as not having the respect that he deserved. She attributed this absence of respect to the principal's interest in trying to accommodate everyone. "He's very, very concerned about teacher morale, extremely, and I think his concern for teacher morale is what's really detrimental to teacher morale…I admire him for trying to make everybody happy, but it certainly doesn't work" (Teacher Interview 51499B). Despite these critiques, overall, the principal appeared to have strong working relationships with most of the faculty and staff concerning the daily operations of the school.

Decision making

The school-site based council and the leadership team are responsible for decision making at Stevens. Teachers felt confident in their input to the site-based council, and they commented that their elected representatives were responsive to their needs and concerns. "If you have some legitimate problems and you voice your opinion to the right people in the right way, things will get corrected or remedied" (Teacher Interview 51299W). Additionally, teachers agreed that the principal was receptive to their concerns in the decisions that the made. "He makes the decisions… but he's really open. If we have suggestions or whatever, he considers them. It's kind of a group effort" (Teacher interview 51299M). One of the council members felt that the process could have been more democratic, but she reported that there were few teachers who passed their concerns to their representatives, "they're always asked for input…but we have very few people who will come and give any input" (Teacher interview 51499B). Overall, teachers reported that the SBDM and school administration were the primary decision makers, but they agreed that their input, individually and through committee involvement, was an integral part of the process.

Internal conflict and collegiality

As with the administration, teachers at Stevens were also divided in their opinions of their colleagues. Teachers offered both complements and criticism of their fellow faculty members. Those teachers who responded to the school-wide survey described their colleagues at trustworthy, hardworking, reliable, effective and doing their jobs.

Several faculty members at Stevens also vocalized their positive feelings about their colleagues' hard work. "I know that these kids have come along and I know how hard everybody in this school works to help them, and they actually work harder than you have to work" (Teacher Interview 51199H). "They're dedicated. They're willing to go the extra mile to do what they have to do" (Teacher Interview 51099C3). These teachers also recognized the devotion of the colleagues to their students, "We have a whole lot of people here who are really wanting these children to do well and we try daily to instill that in the students" (Teacher

Interview 51099C2). "I would still say that our faculty is very strong and there are a lot of good teachers in this building and there are a lot of teachers who care about the kids" (Teacher Interview 51099R). "Most of our teachers are working hard trying to make a difference here" (Teacher interview 51099D).

However, despite these positive feelings, some teachers at Stevens partially attributed their decline to teachers who were not working to their capacity. "We have a large group of teachers who are just counting years…I think there's a lot of people that just get here and get so tired of dealing with the discipline problems and things that it takes over them as far as caring for the children…We've got a huge groups that really cares and really wants our students to do well, and then we have the others who are just putting in their time" (Teacher Interview 51099C2).

In addition to feeling that some teachers were not contributing to the success of the school, several teachers commented that the collegial relationships had weakened as the school dealt with accountability. One teacher noted that, "lack of communication is a big thing around here" (Teacher interview 51499B). Many teachers realized that the high level of teacher turnover affected the quality of relationships among faculty members. "We've had a lot of people come in and go…they just want to come in and do their jobs and get out" (Teacher Interview 51299M). Another teacher echoed these effects of teacher turnover on collegiality and on efforts for innovation. "We have a lot of teachers float in and out here…I think it's a real challenge for the administration to keep a tight focus on anything when its so fluctuating" (Teacher Interview 51199H).

Learning Climate

Deteriorating facilities

Many teachers complained that the condition of the building interfered with the overall learning environment. They commented on the building's appearance and the effects that it had on teacher and student morale. "Our facilities here are dirty. The kids don't take pride in the school because they see it as not taken care of. They complain about it all the time...the paint is falling in on them or whatever. That's an issue to kids. Kids need a clean, inviting place to come that they feel like is important" (Teacher Interview 51099C2). Another teacher reiterated the effects that the building had on the overall instructional climate of the school. "The appearance of the school is very dirty...They feel like their school is dirty and raggedy and this is the poor school, this is all they can get. The paint is peeling off the wall, the roof leaking, just dirt. They don't sweep every day" (Teacher interview 51199H).

Daily instruction

The quality of instruction at Stevens is a constant concern for the faculty, administrators, and the Highly Skilled Educator. During our period of data collection, observations were made of five separate classes. Consistent with the rest of the school, these rooms were bright, and somewhat orderly, although many were cluttered with papers and food wrappers The state's core content for assessment was posted in each of the rooms.. However, in four of the five classrooms, there were frequent disruptions to the teachers' lessons. The instruction in these four classrooms was deemed to be below grade level, and in two of the five classrooms the instruction was inconsistent with the core content or the state assessment. In most cases, students' time was occupied with worksheets and busy work. Overall, the instruction was lack luster in the students' involvement and the teachers' presentation of the material, and the maintenance of student behavior was poor. Several of the observed teachers recognized their weak classroom management skills.

> I had very little control of the classroom. This is a very difficult class to control ...They're just here to make trouble basically. I really do not know what to do with them except when they start acting up, send them out and try to work with the people that are left...by the time I get to where I can teach, I'm so burned out and so flustered that it's hard for me to really be objective about that I should have done differently. It's sort of survival. (Teacher interview 51199L)

Another teacher commented on the effects of student misbehavior on her instruction. "I would like to have time to do more teaching, and we could do more interesting things if I didn't have to worry about the kids always fussing and feuding and fighting and kicking and all of the things that they do" (Teacher Interview 51199).

The effectiveness of the lessons that were observed is most concisely described by one of these teachers. "I would hope that somebody learned something. That's about the most positive thing that I can say about it" (Teacher Interview 51199L).

School Accountability

Assessment scores

As noted in the figure, Stevens fell far short of its state index for improvement. Stevens' scores were nearly 14 points below the goal, causing the school to be labeled "in-decline" according to the accountability guidelines.

Cycle Three Improvement Goal 96-98	Growth Index (Year 1 / 96-97)	Growth Index (Year 2 / 97-98)	Combined Growth Index 96-98	Accountability Cycle Three Status
40.5	27.6	25.9	26.8	In Decline

For the 1998 KIRIS test, Stevens' scores fell below the district and state marks.

7th Grade

	Reading	Science	Writing
Stevens	30.9	5	5.4
District	43.4	17	21.8
State	47	21.7	28

8th Grade

	Math	Social Studies	Practical Living/ Vocational Studies	Arts & Humanities
Stevens	18.4	12.8	9.5	10.4
District	45.2	26.4	19.1	16.7
State	51.4	33	23.5	19.8

Attendance

Aside from their KIRIS scores, Stevens also struggles with student truancy. For the previous six years, Stevens had an average daily attendance rate of 87.9 percent, and during the school year 1999-2000, Stevens had an attendance rate of 87 percent. This was considerably lower than the district-wide rate of 92.41 percent and the statewide rate of 94.03 percent. For the 1997-1998 school year, Stevens reported the lowest attendance for district middle schools and the greatest number of students absent for more than 25 days. During the past four years on an annual basis, Stevens has had more than 250 students who have missed more than 25 days of school (Perry, 1999).

Dealing with Accountability

Educators' reactions

Many teachers at Stevens have been affected by being labeled a school in decline. Their reactions to their accountability status were varied. Some teachers reported that their status led to additional work pressure. "You get really stressed out, the school gets really stressed out"

(Teacher Interview 51299). "It's just so much pressure on you. You just feel that pressure and there's no time really to figure out" (Teacher Interview 51299M). Additionally, they felt that the test was a reflection of the job they were doing and how hard they had been working. "I think it's very important just for my own self-esteem. I feel that if my kids do well on this test, then it makes me feel like I was a success this year that the kids did learn something from me... That's what we've been working for all year long. We put so much time and effort into it that it would almost be discouraging if we didn't go up" (Teacher Interview 51099C3).

One of the curriculum specialists defined her reactions to their status with ambivalence. "I didn't see any difference than what we had before in teacher performance, teacher morale, administration, or student performance. It now had a label. Somebody said, 'Now you are in decline.' We were no lower than we had been the year before or the year before that" (Teacher Interview 51499B).

Other teachers seem to have not been affected by the threat of accountability, "I do my job and I do it well. I was not fearful of what might happen to my job or to me...I think most of them said, 'Let them come in and show us how to do it better. If there's somebody that can do it better, if they have better ideas, then let them come in'" (Teacher Interview 51499B). And some teachers felt defeated by the state's goals for improvement, "I don't want to be too negative. I don't want to say we won't ever get there, but its not going to be within the deadline that they're giving us" (Teacher Interview 51299M). Several teachers also felt that the accountability system was not fair to school with at-risk populations:

> "We feel like we're working just as hard as those teachers over there that are. They're being rewarded because, again, they don't have the obstacles to climb that we do. I think that everybody should be rewarded for making any sort of improvement...We're just getting that we're not good enough no matter what...It seems like all we ever hear is that it's not enough, it's not enough, it's not enough. The kids aren't doing well enough" (Teacher Interview 51299M).

Plans to leave or stay

During the last decade, Stevens has endured a large turnover of teachers. On an annual basis, the school lost 12.8 percent of the faculty; however, the actual percentage lost ranged from a low of 1.7 percent to a high of 26.3 percent (Perry, 1999). The principal felt that the accountability affected teachers' commitment to the school. "When they see the scores and they've worked hard as much as they can and they scores don't improve, I think then the teachers either leave or make excuses" (Principal Interview 51099C).

Of the teachers who responded to the survey, only half of them reported being satisfied most of the time with their current position at Stevens. Twenty-six percent of these respondents were committed to staying, 37 percent have considered leaving, and an additional 26 percent will attempt to transfer at the end of this year. Respondents identified several reasons for staying at Stevens: they like the administration and their colleagues, and appreciate the opportunity to improve their reputation. Their reasons for wanting to leave Stevens included being worn down by students, having too much pressure from accountability, feeling like the school was a sinking ship, and believing that it would not be possible to be successful.

Several teachers voiced their commitment to Stevens and their students. "I really have no desire, and I know I could go anywhere I wanted to. I really like this" (Teacher Interview 51299). "I want to stay here for another year because I feel like there are things that I can still learn here. I feel like I've learned a lot this year actually. I think the difficult things often teach us things and I feel like the things that I've learned, I try to put them in practice and see if it works. I know I'll stay here another year" (Teacher Interview 51199L). Other teachers shared these feelings of commitment to the school. "I'm used to this kind of war zone. I've thought about putting in transfers over the years, but something always happens to make me change my mind" (Teacher Interview 51199N).

Many teachers defined their commitments in terms of fulfillment of a mission or social contract. "I can't say that I would never leave, but right now I feel almost like it's a calling" (Teacher Interview 51099D). These teachers felt that they were contributing to their students' lives. "I want to teach and one reason is just to try to make a difference with somebody's life. If I don't feel that I'm making a difference in their lives, I couldn't stand it. I wouldn't do it. It's not worth it" (Teacher Interview 51199L). "This is probably the mission that I'm doing, and I do view it that way. Somebody has to teach these kids that there's a better life. I think we have a lot more to teach than just academics in this building"(Teacher Interview 51499B). The "missionary" work contributes to their desire to stay at Stevens. "It's challenging, but I also like to work with kids and feel like I'm doing something for them. I feel like a lot of them, this is their only safe place" (Teacher Interview 51199H).

Steps Taken in Response to Decline

The principal and the teachers reported doing as much as possible to educate their students and improve their test scores. Many commented that the school district has tried to incorporate too many programs into the curriculum and instruction as Stevens and that this has only diffused their effectiveness rather than improving education at Stevens. Interestingly, in response to being named a school in decline, rather than increase the number of reform initiatives, teachers at Stevens have worked to refine their instructional program by eliminating those programs that were interfering with their true needs. Thus, the faculty worked on the elimination of programs and focused primarily on literacy. As the principal explained, "if you didn't want a certain program, knowing that too many programs can crowd what you're trying to do, crowd your focus" (Principal Interview 51099C). The faculty members believed that this concentrated effort throughout the building would raise their test scores. The principal explained their increased focus:

> We felt that less is more anyway. We decided to concentrate on about five things and let the rest go...The concentration should be on certain areas. We were spread thin trying to do all the different things based on results of the test, whereas we should have focused mainly on some certain areas...Right now our concentration is on reading because a lot of our kids can't read. Literacy is our main focus. That's what we want to continue to focus on. (Principal interview 51099C)

The principal continued his explanation of the altered program:

> One of the things we're looking at is literacy altogether. Under literacy, you're looking at Accelerated Reading program. You're looking at informational reading. You're looking at the integrated language arts, the Writing to Learn program...things that deal with literacy. We're concentrating more on those particular issues...strategies, more so than all the other things that have happened in the past. (Principal Interview)

In their increased focus on literacy, teachers at Stevens continue to use several innovative programs including DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), increased small group instruction, AVID (a college preparation/study skills class), Writing to Learn, Louisville Writing Project and the Accelerated Reading Program.

Stevens Middle School has invested considerable effort into school improvement. "We've really worked on in. We've done school-wide things, after school meetings, a lot of professional development. We have really worked hard. Nobody can say that our school has not put in a lot of effort to raise our test scores" (Teacher Interview 51099C3).

The principal reinforced the considerable effort that had been given in trying to remedy their decline, "well, we've done some of everything…Everything that the district could come up with or the state has come up with" (Principal Interview 51099).

Teachers reported that they have revamped their curriculum and adopted new instructional methods to align with the state core content. One teacher reported that within her team, the teachers had agreed to reallocate their instructional time to focus on the children's needs. Within this team, the language arts, science and social studies teachers felt that their instruction could be improved by meeting on alternating days in longer blocks of time, while the math teacher on the team continued daily instruction for in a shorter period.

Many teachers also mentioned the inclusion of open response practice questions. In addition to the multiple-choice portions of the CATS test, for each academic area, the students must answer open response essay questions. In preparation for those types of questions, many teachers began including short written response questions in their daily lessons and in their classroom tests and assessments. As one teacher explained,

> We do them in our classroom, we have to do so many on our own. We have to make up our own. That's really helped a lot. That's forced me to really learn about the CATS test…I know we've really been working our tails off on that test. We've really worked on it…We have really worked hard. (Teacher interview 51099C3)

In addition to the open response practices, teachers have also included test-taking strategies in their curriculum, and in preparation for testing, Stevens held school wide rallies to motivate and encourage the students to do well on the CATS test.

Aside from specific changes, teachers at Stevens commented that they work harder and are involved in more meetings and more professional development. The principal also noted that teachers have been involved in more meetings, and he mentioned that the school has been more involved in analyses of their programs and student achievement. They have implemented peer mediation and conflict resolutions programs and have dealt with issues of multiple learning styles and cultural diversity. "The main thing is looking at test results and determining what the reasons for those low test scores are, and working in that area, trying to build on that" (Principal Interview 51099).

According to the requirements of the state, Stevens outlined their efforts of improvement in their Consolidated Plan. The goals included in the plan are to increase the percentage of students scoring at proficient level on the CATS assessment and to improve school climate. In order to accomplish these goals, several strategies were identified. These included improved testing practices, instruction on CATS vocabulary, student awards and after school programs, parental involvement programs, information & technology access, professional development, align curriculum and increased reading instruction.

Teachers and administrators at Stevens mentioned a variety of non-instructional programs they had implemented in response to their decline. In addition to innovations in the classroom, the faculty at Stevens had created several programs to provide students with attendance and behavior incentives. The SPORTS club allowed students to participate in after-school intramural athletics contingent on their classroom success. Also, the Mentors Program paired volunteer faculty members with some of Stevens' most at-risk students for weekly meetings. These mentoring relationships were intended to foster student involvement in school, to build self-esteem, and to provide one-to-one academic assistance. The school librarian coordinated the mentor program that has been growing in popularity in the school, and served 53 students during the past year. She explained how the program benefited Stevens' students:

> We have some success stories there. Some kids are successful and every kid who is in the program is not there because of a problem at home. There are kids in

> there who are borderline with behavior, there are kids who are shy, various needs. We see all kinds of kids in this program, so there is an example of a program that I think is working to reach out to our kids, but I would say that a lot of our kids come with special problems that they have to deal with and that certainly affects how they perform in school work as well as on tests. (Teacher interview 51099D)

Additionally, the Champs lunch, sponsored by a local bank, honors students of the month as their peers select them for a special meal with community leaders. Stevens also established the REACH center, which employs social workers to aid the students and their families with social services to counter balance the effects of their lower socioeconomic status.

In addition, the school has agreed to work with a Highly Skilled Educator. The Highly Skilled Educator at Stevens has more than 30 years of experience in education. Her experiences include classroom teaching, school administration, statewide social studies consulting, and working in the local central office. She reported working at the school for nearly four days each week. She commented that she worked with the leadership team, but also spent considerable time working with the teachers on "any aspect of curriculum and instruction and student achievement" (HSE Interview). She was intent on changing the performance of the students at Stevens and worked diligently to insure the success of the school. She was instrumental in working with the improvement of open response questions, and worked directly with teachers on writing open response questions and including them in their instruction. She required teachers to submit the open response questions that they created every six weeks of the year. She evaluated them and worked individually with those teachers needing assistance.

The HSE also commented at length on the school's efforts to concentrate their instruction on literacy.

> If they [the programs] don't fit in, we're going to ask to have it [sic] removed, and we're also going to ask not to have any more programs added next year so that we can focus our attention and our energies on working with the kids to be

successful...What the school needs to do in order to be successful is focus its energy" (HSE Interview).

Overall, the HSE seemed well received in the school by the teachers and the administration. However, the reading specialist described two types of teachers' reactions and willingness to have the HSE come to their classrooms to provide assistance with issues of curriculum and instruction. "Some people take advantage of that and say, 'Oh yeah, I'd love for you to do that' and then other people close their door, put paper up over the door, lock the door and say 'Let me do what I'm going in my classroom'" (Teacher Interview 51499B).

Through all of the changes in the instructional program, the inclusion of multiple motivational programs, and the addition of the HSE to the faculty, Stevens has undergone several changes. And many of the teachers at Stevens commented that all of this effort has benefited the students as well as the school at large.

Importance of standards/ importance of CATS scores

Teachers at Stevens readily commented on the importance of state standards in their classroom and how important it was for them to increase the CATS scores at their school. For some teachers, the standards and their assessment performance were crucial to their jobs and their daily interactions with students. However, others admitted that the standards and test scores had little effect on them.

One teacher reported whole-hearted adoption of the core content. "My whole teaching is based upon the performance standards. What I'm teaching is what they said I have to teach" (Teacher Interview 51099C3). Another implemented these standards because of the benefit to her students. "These kids are so short-changed in life and I think they really need to know what they have to learn, and by keeping those standards posted, kids know that I have to do this, I have to do that" (Teacher Interview 51299W).

One teacher voiced his reluctance to change his instruction. "Some kids are just not going to move. If a kid doesn't want to do it, just give them some worksheets and they're happy, you're happy, the class is still functioning (Teacher Interview 51499SB). Another teacher commented that the increased focus on test taking strategies had interfered with her curriculum. "I don't get to teach as much science, but they sure know how to take a test" (Teacher Interview 51199). One teacher resented the increased work that the accountability system brought. "I just want to come in my room and try to do what I can do for my kids and I don't want to be bothered with all the paperwork because that's all it is – just a lot of paperwork" (Teacher Interview 51299M). Some teachers reported that the test did not reflect what they thought was important. "I think the testing is on things that our children are not taught. We have some staff that thinks 'Well, these are the things that I think are important and I'm going to teach that regardless of what the state tells me to teach, and I teach it until they know it whether its week one or week 40 in the year, we'll still be working on it'" (Teacher Interview 51499B).

For many teachers, the test scores did not motivate their teaching.

> I'd love to see them come up, but I'm not going to sit there and drill the kids the test, over and over again, because drilling them a test is not going to give them what they need in the really world...I can't say that it never bothers me that the scores haven't gone up or haven't gone down...That's not my key goal. My key is to get them ready for next year or getting them ready for high school. (Teacher Interview 51299)

"If you're a good teacher you'll be successful in your classroom not matter what a standardized test says. If you're a good teacher, you're reaching the kids and you're developing their skills and you're making them prepared and ready to move on to the next challenge" (Teacher Interview 51099R). For some, the importance of raising their scores was related to their reputation. "We just all want to raise the scores so that we can lose some of the stigma we have about Stevens Middle" (Teacher interview 51299). "It's very important to me because I think that… I just don't like the negative part that I hear about this school. I think we've got a good school. I think we've got a good faculty here at this school" (Teacher Interview 599PL). The principal echoed this sentiment. "It's very important for me to feel successful and for my staff and kids to feel successful" (Principal interview).

Those teachers that responded to our survey rated KIRIS/CATS as the ninth most important indicator of success, which tied with the teacher's ability to just know that students were successful. The most important indicator they named was student completion of classroom tasks. The others that they listed as more important that the test scores included: lively participation of class, answers from individual students, high test scores on class tests, praise from colleagues, positive comments from parents, CTBS scores, and praise from principal. Each of these was more important that success on the state assessment. The only indicator of success that was ranked below the CATS test was affection from students.

The following teacher was torn between her devotion to her students and their performance on the state assessment.

> It's so hard to teach them for it and the weeks before I try to drill things that I've taught. We made a big deal about the test, we gave them rewards if they would stay awake during the test and actually take it and get here on time and be here for the test and that kin of thing. I'm just thinking if we get the scores back and they haven't done well, it's going to be a real crushing blow to me because I've invested a lot of myself into that test and it isn't for a reward for the state to say "Well done." It's because I'm thinking "Well, this guy over here, he's good. I want him to do well. I want this girl to do well." It's more like I'm into the individual students and you're thinking you're teaching them. They do well in class, they do well on your tests and quizzes and you feel like you're teaching them. Then if they don't do well on the test, you're going to feel kind of like you're not doing it right or something. To me the rewards or the non-rewards are not as important as the students themselves and whether they're doing well or not. (Teacher Interview 51199L)

Blaming the district

In the early 1990s, the district implemented a system allowing students to attend schools outside of their attendance areas based on preferences and interests. This program was intended to reverse the need for busing to integrate district schools. Prior to this transition, Stevens primarily served students from the surrounding neighborhood, and up until this, Stevens was an average neighborhood school. However, Stevens was one of a small number of schools in the district that was not restructured as a magnet school, and thus did not require application for attendance. With the option of choosing a magnet school, most neighborhood parents removed their children from Stevens to enroll them in the traditional magnet middle school located nearby. This resulted in a shift in population which eliminated many of Stevens's stronger students and those places were filled with students who had either not applied for placement in a magnet school, or who had been denied placement.

The faculty members at Stevens feel that they have been given a population of students with a disproportionate number of problems. They commented that their current students performed at a lower level and they had more problems associated with their socioeconomic status and their lives at home. One teacher described the Stevens students in this way, "we pull from a rough group of kids" (Teacher interview 51299).

Teachers felt that the division of students throughout the district was unfair. "It almost seems like this school is a school that the system dumps on" (Teacher interview 51199N). The term "dumping ground" was frequently used in teachers' description of the effect of district's magnet policy. "If we could get some of the kids who live in the neighborhood to attend our school, that would impact our student population. Sometimes it almost feels like a dumping ground for certain programs" (Teacher Interview 51099D). "You've got to have a dumping ground, which is what I feel like we are. I don't feel they [the district] really care about these kids. They can tell us that we don't, but we're here with them. I could have gone other places, but I'm here with these kids" (Teacher Interview 51299M).

The teachers felt that they had problems to deal with that other schools in the district did not have. "We do learn at different levels and there are barriers that this school, that many schools...don't face" (Teacher Interview 51499B). Because of the additional problems that teachers encountered, most felt that it was unfair for the district to compare their lack of success with the magnet middle schools.

> For some reason they don't want to acknowledge the kind of kids that we have to deal with every day... I just wish that people would realize where we are here and what we're dealing with every day. You can't really compare what goes on here with one of these other schools. If you can work here, you can work anywhere. (Teacher Interview 51199N)

They felt that other schools were rewarded for the assessment scores because they had the top students in the district. "They're being rewarded again because they don't have the obstacles to climb that we do"(Teacher interview 51299M). Additionally, teachers felt that Stevens was lacking the programs and the students that made neighborhood parents want to keep their students at Stevens. "We don't' have things that other schools have that draw top students to this building" (Teacher interview 51099R).

The HSE explained the school's population in this way, "This is a school that deals with low socioeconomic students who come from homes with parents who either haven't had the initiative or the desire to put their students into top programs" (HSE Interview 51199). The principal echoed the effects of the district policy on CATS performance, "I can't expect over night success. It's not going to be that way because of what we draw from. Besides that, the pie has been set up according to the way the district set it up and not the way we want it set up" (Principal Interview 51099).

Redefining progress

Stevens' faculty members felt that they had made considerable progress with their students, but that their efforts had not been evident on the KIRIS/CATS test. "Its hard when you work year after year and you think that you've done well and you see that your children have made some progress, but it never shows on paper" (Teacher Interview 51099C2). Also, because so many of their students enter the sixth grade at a second/third grade reading level, they feel that the movement of the student to the fifth grade level in one year goes unrecognized as an accomplishment because the student still isn't on grade level as he/she progresses to seventh grade. This frustration seemed evident in many of the teachers. "It's frustrating to work so hard and then not see your work reflected in your test scores" (Teacher interview 51099D).

Aside from their progress not being revealed in test scores, the teachers and faculty feel that many of their "successes" can not be measured on the state assessment. They commented that they have to address so many other needs of the students because of their living conditions before we can address academics.

> We have these high expectations for them and I found out for some of them to even be in school is a major accomplishment for the day. It was a rude awakening that education is not the top priority with a lot of these kids because there are issues in their lives that they're dealing with every day. (Teacher interview 51099D)

They explained that these outside forces were interfering with the schools ability to improve. "Our kids are not going to be as successful as some other schools because they're up against a lot of things" (Teacher Interview 51299M). Other teachers explained their concerns in these terms: "in some ways, it's not realistic for my kids. We need to have our own set of guidelines. Not what's going on all over the state...Success for us in one thing and when you're going by the state guidelines, district guidelines, we may not be as successful" (Teacher interview 51299M). "These kids don't get what they need at home, so we end up doing everything for them, being the mother, the father, the confidante, you name it, we're it. I think that's where the problem is. We can't do everything" (Teacher Interview 51299W).

Summary

Stevens Middle School confronts considerable obstacles in working to improve students' performance on the state assessment. Despite high levels of poverty, high truancy, and student discipline concerns, the teachers and administrators are committed to trying a variety of tactics to improve the school, its performance, and its reputation. Although the many teachers feel that they are fighting insurmountable odds, they are devoted to improving their students' lives. As described by the principal,

> We haven't convinced the community yet that this is a good school and we have a good working staff that tried to meet the needs of the students...The school is a good school, the teachers work hard. The kids need a lot of nurturing, but at the same time, we need to stress the academics. (Principal Interview 51099)

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

Schools on Probation

in the States of Maryland and Kentucky

VOLUME IV

BY
JAMES CIBULKA
AND
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TECHNICAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO
THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FIELD INITIATED STUDY:
THE EFFECT OF RECONSTITUTION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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PART IX. THE POLITICS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN KENTUCKY AND MARYLAND

1. Introduction

The growth of accountability measures in K-12 education policy has been one of the most noteworthy developments of the last decade. Nearly all states, and many local school systems, have devised accountability systems which work in tandem with other features of the state's education reforms. Typically, these other features include one or more of the following: standards for student performance, curriculum frameworks, a student assessment system, and reporting of student, school, district, and state performance. Sometimes these policies are high-stakes in that they carry a system of rewards and/or sanctions for individuals or organizational units. In some places, there are attempts to align the accountability system with a range of other policies, including teacher licensure, professional development, accreditation, or other features. In other words, within this accountability trend, there is considerable diversity in policy design. There also has been a widely variable political environment within which these accountability policies have grown up. To see these accountability systems as exercises in policy design without examining the politics surrounding them would be to miss an important part of their logic. In many states only pieces of the policies are adopted or survive, owing to political conflict. These political realities cannot be underestimated because they are likely to influence whether accountability systems are judged a success or failure over the long-term. Sustainability of policies is not the same as effectiveness, but without the capacity to survive, effective policies cannot be created (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). If these policies cannot survive long enough to be actually tested for their effectiveness, or if the controversy surrounding accountability policies undercuts the credibility of other related education reforms, such as student standards, these politics will prove fatal indeed.

It also is the case that accountability policies have become a craze despite a paucity of information about whether these policies will succeed or fail. Past accountability policies have been fraught with problems (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Kirst, 1990). Generally, information about policy effectiveness, past and present, comes from what Kingdon calls the "solution stream" dominated by specialists and academicians who study and evaluate the efficacy of alternative approaches to addressing problems. In this respect, the adoption of reconstitution policies by policy makers in the absence of evidence that they will work hardly is a unique phenomenon, since there often is a loose relationship between the actors who place problems on the policy agenda, those who propose solutions, and the politicians who have the capacity to give these ideas needed support in order for a policy to be adopted. Indeed, problems, solutions, and political support form separate, relatively autonomous "streams" which only serendipitously link when a "policy window" opens.

The purpose of Part IX of this report is to examine the politics of adoption and implementation of accountability and school improvement policies in two states, Kentucky and Maryland. Both states have had high-stakes accountability systems since the early 1990's. Both were "ahead of the curve" in adopting these policies, as well as related systemic education reforms. Their early adoption and systemic perspective may make them atypical states. However, these features also make them important "critical cases" which allow us to examine how such policies have performed for approximately a decade under conditions where at least initially there was strong political support. The fact that the accountability systems still survive may also make these two states atypical, but as we shall see, this survival has hardly been devoid of political opposition and troublesome problems in the design of the policies. Thus, while we would not contend that our findings about the developments in these two states are generalizable, we shall argue that the two states do point to some significant challenges such policies face, both of a political and substantive nature. In our political analysis we focus on the following questions and issues: What political coalition(s) have dominated the adoption and implementation of accountability policies in these states, particularly those pertaining to low-performing schools? How sustainable are these policies? In particular, has evidence about the effectiveness of the policies and policy learning affected political support for or opposition to the policies? To the degree that sustainability is problematic, why is this so? Alternatively, if the politics has been so tranquil as to make sustainability not an issue, how does this political support affect policy effectiveness?

2. Research Methods

The data base for this research combines state and system-wide data and case study data from eleven schools in six districts and two states. The research on educators' responses is described in more detail in Parts I through VIII of this report. At the state and local levels we developed an extensive document base, conducted a total of 35 interviews with administrators, civic leaders, and politicians, and other stakeholders. The data for this part of the report draw most heavily on the interviews with civic and political elites as well as document analysis. For Kentucky, data sources also include observations of the 2000 General Assembly regular session. These observations included about 72 hours of committee meetings in both houses (Senate & House) and a number of joint committee meetings prior to the session in the fall of 1999.

3. Conceptual Framework

It is useful to view a policy system as being characterized by one or more advocacy coalitions. According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), an advocacy coalition is a more or less stable set of cooperative relationships among actors, generally persisting for a decade or more, in which the binding characteristic is a core of common beliefs. The actors in the coalition can be officials in government, interest groups, policy entrepreneurs, and others. Indeed, this advocacy coalition concept broadens the conception of policy as more than a set of formal institutional arrangements, allocation of authority, and roles. Policy is the use of government authority and resources to respond to a problem as seen by some segment of the polity. Yet the advocacy coalition is more than a mere coalition of convenience created in the short run by interest groups. It is a relatively enduring set of alliances built around deep core beliefs which are normative and ontological axioms about the nature of man and the relative priority of different values such as freedom, power, and equality; a policy core, characterized by beliefs about the proper scope of government vs. markets, distribution of authority among levels of government, identification of groups whose welfare is most critical, orientation on substantive policy conflicts, basic choices concerning policy instruments, such as coercion vs. persuasion, the role of citizen vs. elite participation in shaping policy, and so on. In addition, the coalition is bound by secondary aspects which are largely instrumental concerns about administrative rules, budget allocations, statutory interpretations and revisions; information on program performance, and so on. The deep core of beliefs is most resistant to change, while members of the coalition are most likely to be open on questions concerning their secondary beliefs. Their near (policy) core beliefs are an intermediate case, somewhat open to change. Thus, unlike pluralist theory, the advocacy coalition approach views policy as an embodiment of ideas, not merely an exchange of interests which are subject to frequent realignment.

Generally speaking, major shifts in policy are sparked by exogenous events. Significant perturbations external to the subsystem include changes in socioeconomic conditions, in system-wide governing coalitions, or policy outputs from other systems (Kingdon,1995). Kingdon speaks of crises, disasters, symbols, and other focusing events which affect awareness of a problem or redefines the way a problem is perceived. At the same time, some of the factors propelling change may be endogenous to the policy system. Feedback information about the operation of existing programs may bring problems to the attention of government officials, members of a rival advocacy coalition, or the general public. Exogenous forces are most likely to destabilize the existing policy and open an advocacy coalition to challenges from another coalition or to force it to reassess some of the core assumptions, at least with respect to policy. Because its core beliefs are impermeable, it may be unwilling or unable to change its assumptions about the efficacy of its current policies. On the other hand, endogenous information may alter secondary aspects of the advocacy coalition's belief system and lead it to alter its policy, most typically at the margins.

This framework is a helpful starting point for understanding the policies discussed in this report, and the alignment of political forces which have created, sustained, or opposed them.

4. Overview of Reforms in Both States

Table IX.1 provides the basic information concerning the education accountability policies of both states. While both state's reforms had their origins in the early 1990s, Kentucky's policies resulted from a landmark court decision requiring the complete revamping of the state's education system by the state legislature. In Maryland the policies emerged from a gubernatorial study commission and were adopted by the state board. As a result, Kentucky's reforms were adopted as a comprehensive package, compared to Maryland's incremental approach beginning with assessments. However, even in Kentucky the student performance standards came nearly four years before the content standards, a fact which led to controversy from the teachers' perspective about the legitimacy of the test.

Maryland has kept the same assessment, the Maryland School Performance Assessment System (MSPAP) intact since 1992, given in grades 3, 5, and 8. However, it has recently added a requirement for the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), a norm-referenced test, in some other grades. This occurred after data collection for our study was completed. The state is now pilot testing end-of-course assessments in core subjects at the high-school level. No decision has been made as to whether these will be high-stakes for students, which means requiring them for graduation from high-school. In Kentucky, there is a new Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System (CATS) in grades 3 through 12. Grades 3, 9 and 11 take CTBS, and Grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11/12 take the KCCT (Kentucky Core Content Tests). Together with non-cognitive indicators, the CTBS and KCCT make up CATS. The new CATS replaces the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), which was more performance based.

In Maryland, the expectation level for the performance standard is that 70 percent of students in each school will perform at the satisfactory level on MSPAP, based on three possible levels: excellent, satisfactory, or not met. In Kentucky, as of spring 2000, new baselines were issued to schools with a goal of 100 (proficiency) stretched across biennia to the year 2014. A performance band was calculated for each school with the targeted performance across each biennium set by the baseline. Every two years schools are compared within their class of schools, that is, not only against their performance line, but also against the third of Kentucky schools within their base line of relative performance. So if a school is in the top third of Kentucky schools' scores, not only must the school look at its progress toward the goal for 2014, but it also gets compared on its relative performance against other schools with similar baselines.

With regard to incentives, both states have a reward feature in their programs. In Maryland, since 1996 schools have been eligible for monetary rewards for making progress toward achieving state standards and high attendance rates. The so-called "school performance index" must improve for two to four years consecutively and was changed to require that schools with diverse student bodies must show a significant gain among all subgroups of students. In Kentucky, the reward system has changed somewhat as well. Under KIRIS, there were rewards for increasing the proportion of successful students over a two-year period. There are five reward levels, and certified staff voted on how to spend the money, including the option of going directly to teachers. Under CATS, this direct-benefit feature was to change, but the Attorney General ruled that it still could be given to teachers. The use is determined by the principal and school council, based on meeting a school improvement goal and an annual dropout rate below eight percent.

Table IX.1 - Policy Design of State Education Accountability Systems

	Maryland	Kentucky
Origin	State board actions 1990, 1991, and thereafter enacted Maryland School Performance Program.	Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 by Kentucky State Board of Education, Kentucky Department of Education actions.
	Performance Measurements	
Standards	Maryland Learning Outcomes, content standards (new), core learning goals for high school.	Student performance standards, followed by content standards later.
Assessments	Maryland School Performance Assessment System (MSPAP) Grades 3,5, 8. High school assessments under development.	Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) Performance Based - Grades 4, 5, 8, 11, 12. New Commonwealth Accountability and Testing System (CATS) – Grades 3-12. Grades 3, 6, 9 take CTBS; grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11/12 take KCCT (Kentucky Core Content Tests).
Expectations	70% of students in each school should perform at the satisfactory level or above on MSPAP.	KIRIS: All schools and districts should show adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward a 20 year proficiency goal. The average student performance level must improve over the baseline performance for each biennium. Continuous improvement model. CATS: As of spring 2000, baselines were issued to schools with a goal of 100 (proficiency) stretched across biennia to the year 2014.
Incentives/ Rewards	Since 1996 schools are eligible for monetary awards for making substantial and sustained progress toward achieving state standards and high attendance rates. The school performance index must improve for 2-4 years and must show a significant gain among all subgroups of students.	KIRIS: Rewards for increasing the proportion of successful students over a two-year period. Five reward levels. Certified staff voted on ways reward funds would be spent, but could not be added to salary. CATS: Focus on meeting school improvement goal and annual dropout rate below 8%. Use determined by school council/principal.

Interventions/Sanctions		
Performance Standards	Student Performance: Excellent, Satisfactory, Not Met. Schools below satisfactory and declining or not making substantial and sustained improvements are placed under local reconstitution and local authority to improve (Probation). State board reconstitution occurs after probationary efforts described above fail. For elementary schools, local reconstitution is based on attendance rate and MSPAP tests in grades 3 and 5. For middle schools, the criteria are attendance rate, results of the functional tests (taken up through high school and reflected back to the appropriate middle school), and MSPAP tests in grade 8. For high schools, attendance and dropout rates and the composite results of functional tests at the end of 9th and 11th grades are used.	Student performance levels: Distinguished, Proficient, Apprentice, Novice. KIRIS: Schools placed in one of five categories: Rewards, Success, Improving, In Decline, or In Crisis. (Last category now eliminated.)
Oversight	The State board must approve a school improvement plan. The state monitors progress of implementation.	Distinguished Educator(s) were assigned to schools. Under CATS, schools failing to improve will be reviewed by a scholastic audit team appointed by the state board. Districts have accountability index, and may be required to do audits.
Assistance	Additional financial aid is provided.	Under Highly Skilled Educator program, assistance is provided on an advisory basis.

Both states also have sanctions for schools with low-performance. In Maryland, beginning in 1994, schools below satisfactory and declining or not making substantial and sustained improvement are placed under local reconstitution (probation). If a school fails to improve under probation, it is reconstituted by the state board of education, which can include various options, such as closing the school or contracting with another provider. In Kentucky, under KIRIS schools were placed in one of five categories: Rewards, Success, Improving, In Decline, or In Crisis. Currently under CATS, if the school is in the top third of schools, it probably will not be subject to any state interventions. In the bottom third, there is a mandatory scholastic audit by a state trained stakeholder group of practicing teachers, higher education people, parents, and business people. The designations are: reward, maintaining, and targeted schools.

Each state has provisions for oversight of low-performing schools. In Maryland, under local reconstitution the local district is responsible for improving the school's performance. The state board must approve a school improvement plan annually, and it monitors progress of implementation. Each school is provided with additional resources, based on an enrollment formula.

In Kentucky, under the earlier provisions, a distinguished educator (DE) was required in all low-performing schools, known as the "DE Program." These individuals were selected and trained by the state to spend significant time in each school providing guidance and assistance. Due to some discontent with the term "distinguished," their title was changed in 1998 to "highly skilled educators" (HSE's). Despite the name change, the so-called "HSE Program" got significant increased funding compared to its first 6 years. Under the current law, districts still have an accountability index calculated on a formula for all of their schools, which targets some of them as low-performing. However, under the new policy, they provide support to school only if they are invited by the school after the required audit has occurred. Additional financial support is provided from the Commonwealth School Improvement Funds. Districts may be required to do audits of "maintaining" schools.

5. A Summary of Policy Developments in Kentucky

In Kentucky, quilt making and policy development seem to have a lot in common. During the design and stitching of quilts, the quilters come to an understanding of what pieces attach where and what the size of pieces and stitches must be. Lively discussion punctuates the air as the quilters identify the colors, fabrics, and necessary filling. Do the stitches merely hold the pieces together or are the stitches part of the design? Do the colors of the fabric suffice for the design or are contrasting threads necessary? The making of the quilt invites more discussion, but the design debate has waned and the chatter surrounding quilting bees may be more a distraction from the tedious aspects of sewing construction than a focus on the task. Once the quilt is done, most of the quilters move on to the next quilt. Few linger to admire the wear and tear on the quilt itself. Is it functional? Is it warm? These questions hardly bother quilters any these days as the art of quilting has passed from a survival skill to a craft (Clarke, 1976).

Kentucky's educational accountability policy was fashioned as a necessary survival mechanism for its public schools in the 1980s, when the state was required to entirely rebuild its educational system in response to a school finance lawsuit. Much as in quilt-making, throughout the 1990s, the shape of these policies were an intense focus of debate as they were constructed. But in the new millennium, Kentucky policymakers' interest in the reforms seems, if not apathetic, at least distracted from the functional questions of accountability policy effectiveness or adequacy.

The evolution of Kentucky's accountability policy attracted enormous interest (Foster, 1999; Steffy, 1993). Its implementation generated attention, but its revision and subsequent application has remained fairly low profile for nearly every sector and stakeholder. What 1990s policymakers thought would prove fruitful by 2002, has been reconstructed and re-projected to 2014 by the 1998 Kentucky General Assembly and the State Board of Education. The 2000 regular session of the General Assembly deliberately avoided addressing any aspect of Kentucky's accountability policy in order to let what the 1998 session had wrought take place (Lindle, 1999; 2000). The very first regular, odd-year (2001) session of the General Assembly in 151 years, threw absolutely no spotlight on the accountability policy or very little else for that matter (2001, March 25). *Lexington Herald-Leader*, p. E1. Yet, as we shall see, the coalition which created this reform has unraveled to a degree; and the political challenge which coalesced in 1998 was strong enough to significantly alter the accountability provisions, although not strong enough to unravel the quilt.

A History of Localism

For most of its history, Kentucky's approach to its educational system involved local politics more than state interest or intervention (Caudill, 1963; Foster, 1999). Part of the supremacy of local school district politics came from the privileged position of Kentucky's 120 counties in dictating the affairs of local residents (Clark, 1992; Miller, 1994). The very proliferation of counties in Kentucky, third to Texas and Georgia, derived from a political specification that Kentucky's residents live in proximity to their county seats (Campbell, 1998; Miller, 1994). But the traditional culture embedded in each county and between each county made those county seats the exclusive purview of elites. At the state level, political culture ensured that even county elites faced a pecking order where certain regions of the state enjoyed more privilege and more political "pork" than others (Elazar, 1994; Miller, 1994).

Such internal and external competition ensured a certain hierarchical stagnation that persists in the form of regional pockets of both poverty and wealth (Caudill, 1962;

Peirce, 1987). Kentucky's political culture and history certainly suggest that the radical reform of its educational system is better represented by the slow geological forces that produce an earthquake than by the lightening quick strike of a tornado. It took more than a decade to stitch together the coalition of elites and property-poor school districts that brought about Kentucky's revolution in education.

Although many Kentucky notables have lamented the poor conditions of its public schools (e.g. Caudill, 1963; Stuart, 1958, 1967), none seemed to have had the political wherewithal to do anything about it. From the 1950s through the 1980s, educational reform would be passed in one session of the General Assembly and then quickly repealed in the next (Combs, 1991; Dove, 1991).

The Role of Elites in Promoting Reform

Within this historical context, the process of creating a reform coalition in the 1980s truly did resemble quilt-stitching. Perhaps it is possible to locate the beginning of this process in the late 1970s. The Council on Higher Education, itself an agency of political appointees by governors and legislators, provided the spark for public school reform (Sexton, 2001). Originally known as the Committee on Higher Education in Kentucky's Future, its chair, Edward F. Prichard, was a rehabilitated Kentucky politician who had been caught forging votes in his home county in the 1950s (Campbell, 1998). Prichard's concern, not only for the plight of Kentucky's institutions of higher education but also for Kentucky's public elementary and secondary schools, provided this committee with more endurance than the typical blue ribbon panel (Campbell, 1998; Hunter, 1999). The Committee focused on the question, "What is an educated person?"

(Campbell, 1998, p.267). Struggling as ever with Kentucky's governors' and legislators' political reluctance to invest in education, in 1981 Prichard's committee nevertheless proposed a "Fund for Academic Excellence" and several measures to improve undergraduate and graduate education. The then-governor ignored the report; the committee, however, did not summarily disband (Adams, 1993; Campbell, 1998; Parrish, 1990).

From 1983 through 1989, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence incorporated as a not-for-profit organization charged with generating support for elementary and secondary school reform. The Prichard Committee traveled the state gathering a limited membership of local elites and parents of school-aged children. While many could contribute to the organization, the membership was limited from 30 to 60 individuals (Hunter, 1999). Pointedly, elected officials and educators did not comprise any part of the membership, so as to allow the Prichard Committee a measure of independence and credibility (Hunter, 1999, p.489). All the same, a former governor, Bert Combs, and Edward Prichard both spent time eliciting funds for the committee's work (Adams, 1993; Hunter, 1998).

The trips around the state stimulated more than monetary support. The Prichard Committee persisted in asking Prichard's original question, "What is an educated person?" Through town hall meetings, with an emerging statewide structure that was similar to the League of Women Voters, the Prichard Committee managed to engage the entire state in a vision for better education (Adams, 1993; Campbell, 1998). The ultimate town hall was held November 15, 1984, through the mechanism of the Kentucky Education Television network and its links with all 176 school districts in Kentucky

(Adams, 1993; Campbell, 1998). The question that night was, "What do you want your schools to do?" (Sexton, 2001, p. 4). Two outcomes ensued from this pivotal statewide forum. One was obviously a list of answers to the question - published in a report by the Prichard Committee in 1985 - and the other was the Council for Better Education.

The Plight of Property-Poor Districts as Reform Stimulus

By 1985, the Council for Better Education came together as a group of 66 property-poor school districts and more than 20 individual students, represented pro bono by former Governor Bert Combs (Combs, 1991; Dove, 1991; Hunter, 1999). In the summer of 1985, the Council filed against the Kentucky General Assembly challenging the financing system (Foster, 1999; Steffy, 1993). The Prichard Committee testified in the 1987 trial and then filed an amicus brief in 1988 (Hunter, 1999). The trial judge appointed a select committee to hold five public hearings about the meanings of the education section of the constitution and then used this input for his ruling (Dove, 1991; Hunter, 1999). While the then-governor appeared at least resigned to the ruling, legislative leaders chose to appeal to the Kentucky Supreme Court in 1989 (Combs, 1991). In a state that prides itself on its perverse approach to politics, by 1989 Kentucky showed its willingness to support education with higher taxes, according to a statewide poll (Hunter, 1999; Miller, 1994). Astoundingly, the Kentucky Supreme Court, despite its criticism of the trial judge, upheld his findings. The judges declared that the legislature had failed in its constitutional duty to provide an efficient system of common schools (*Rose v. the Council for Better Education*, 1989).

The governor and legislature quickly formed committees to design a comprehensive, omnibus education bill that would change the structure of Kentucky education from the state level to the school building and, hopefully, in the classrooms. The design of this state reform has been explicated elsewhere in greater detail (see Foster, 1999; Lindle, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Steffy, 1993). Not nearly enough has been written about the implementation of this comprehensive approach to education reform.

The Quilting Bee Years - The 1990s

Despite a designed avoidance of affiliation with the commonwealth's professional educators, the Prichard Committee instrumentally gathered professional organizations and educational agencies together in a group known as the Education Coalition (Adams, 1993; Hunter, 1999). The professional organizations included Kentucky affiliates of teacher and administrator organizations such as the Kentucky Education Association and the Kentucky Association of School Administrators. Parent organizations also met at the table with the professional organizations (Adams, 1999; Sexton, 2001). The group met regularly from 1988 until approximately 1996 (Adams, 1993; Hunter, 1999).

Most of the divisive proposals for Kentucky educational legislation were debated and designed within this group. Much of the compromise necessary to set the legislation was first tempered by the discussions facilitated in the Education Coalition (Hunter, 1999).

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The Emergence of a Rival Coalition

After 1996, aspects of the accountability system were fully implemented and stirred divisive political forces among these groups (Lindle, 1999; 2000a) and, by the 1998 regular session of the General Assembly, the Coalition was unraveling. Legislators were highly pressured by their constituents to remove the stigma of the accountability system (Fuhrman, 1999; Kelley, 1998; Lindle, 1999; Stecklow, 1997).

The 1998 session of the Kentucky General Assembly heaped teachers and parents together in a rather confused alliance against the original assessment and accountability system. Both groups agreed that the system was "unfair," but their specific grievances were actually opposed to one another. Teachers decried the "unprofessional" aspects of being held accountable (Abelman & Kenyon, 1996; Kannapel, Coe, Aagaard & Moore, 1996; Kelley & Protsik, 1996; Lindle, 1999, 2000a). Parents, on the other hand, felt the quality of the test left a lot to be desired. Parents specifically objected to the test scoring their children, heretofore identified as "A" students, "novice" or "apprentice," and used these anecdotes as evidence of the Kentucky assessments' lack of reliability and validity (Lindle, 1999). In fact, the developmental phases of the Kentucky assessments were called into question by several studies commissioned by the legislature's educational oversight arm, the Office of Educational Accountability (Petrosko, 2001). A conservative group known as the Family Foundation carefully nurtured parental objections to the tests from 1993 (Hunter, 1999). A single spokesperson, Martin Cothran, offered an articulate challenge to members of the General Assembly and the Kentucky Department of Education on aspects of the assessment in his favorite venue, the Kentucky Capitol steps (Hunter, 1999; [R23 -12/14/99]).

More than one observer remarked on how the Kentucky Department of Education slunk through the 2000 session instead of taking a stand [R65-1/26/00; R23-12/14/99; R221-12/20/99]. The voices of the session were teachers and parents more or less independent of the voice of the Prichard Committee, which strained to preserve the essence of Kentucky Education Reform (Hunter, 1999). Local school administrators and school board members also vocally opposed the Prichard committee's long time stance on corruption and nepotism-free education (Hunter, 1999).

As a result of these alliances, the legislature redesigned the system in 1998 to include more legislative oversight in the actual design of the accountability formula and tests. The Legislature's own Office of Educational Accountability was to perform audits of the testing system. In addition, a committee of national testing experts reported to both the legislature and the State Board of Education. Finally, the State Board, the legislature, and the governor all appointed various professional and citizen representatives to a committee that was to report to both the legislature and state board on the design for testing and accountability as submitted by the national experts. The bottom line for the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years was an interim accountability system that would form the baseline for the redesigned system. Instead of a continuous progress model in which each school charted progress only against itself, the redesigned system allowed for relative progress of comparison of a class of schools against their predicted performance. Instead of a set of assessment measures as the only check on school quality, an elaborate audit system was added for schools performing at the bottom of their class (Lindle, 1999; Petrosko, 2001).

The Declining Salience of Education Reform

The rising individualism of parents, school boards, administrators and teachers actually lent strength to another group fostered by the Prichard Committee, the Partnership for Kentucky Schools (Adams, 1993; Hunter, 1999). The Partnership dates back to 1991 as a commitment among major Kentucky businesses similar to Business Roundtables found in other areas of the US. The Partnership has perhaps more influence with the Kentucky legislature as economic conditions continually change in the commonwealth as in the nation and globally (Hunter, 1999). Despite the erosion of legislative attention to Kentucky's education agenda, the presence of business was heavily felt in the 2001 session (2001, March 25). *Lexington Herald-Leader*, p. E1. Though business self-interest drives legislative interests, the self-interests of the splintering educational groups may well drive education off the agenda.

By 2000, many of the stakeholders admitted missing Education Coalition meetings. One respondent looked at it this way:

> You know most of the conversations that we hold in that group are held somewhere else. I wouldn't say it's totally [obsolete] and [the facilitator] I think has done a wonderful job of trying to maintain that group. And we do talk about critical issues. I don't go as often as I used to because I've got too many other things to do. But for a time it served a valuable purpose. One of things that has developed over time is that we all figured out that we have to work together on issues outside of that forum. So that has almost - it's been kind of - as they say changed over time. It filled a void when it started. It wasn't going on but over the 10 or 12 years that it has been going on the world outside that coalition has changed to the point of where we are all kind of working together outside the coalition anyway. [Now] It's almost a duplication of effort. I think we have to sit down very frankly at some point and say do we really need to meet like this anymore. And again it's not a slam at the way it's been run or any of the parties. It's just time to do something else. [R23 -12/14/99]

Another respondent thought that the coalition had diminished in influence because accountability policy was a moving target [R65-1/26/00]. Other respondents felt that legislators were either worn out on the issue, or just wanted time to see the new provisions work [R 65-1/26/00; R221-12/20/99]. The legislative education agenda in 2000 focused nearly completely on the issue of teacher quality, specifically the preparation and professional development of teachers (1998, November 15; 1998, November 17) *Lexington Herald-Leader*. The teacher quality issue split the alliance that teachers and parents built in 1998. The 2000 legislative session degenerated into a tense brawl between the Kentucky Education Association and particular members of the General Assembly (Lindle, 2000a).

Accountability as Art & Craft - 1998 to 2014?

Many of the actors engaged in Kentucky's education reform over the last two decades are dead or retired. Edward F. Prichard died in December 1984 at the dawn of the education coalition necessary for the birth of major executive, judicial, legislative, and political change. Even legislators and Kentucky's legislative observers suggest that the Kentucky General Assembly's attention to education is probably vanishing.

Before and during the 2000 regular General Assembly's session, legislators and lobbyists both predicted that accountability would not surface as an issue. More than one person noted that the 1998 session "had taken care of it" [R34-12/17/99; R65-1/26/00 R221-12/20/99].

The national elections of 2000 diverted Kentucky from specific attention to its own issues, except for a constitutional amendment that provided for yearly legislative sessions for the first time since the 1850s. The 2000 session produced no omnibus reforms for teacher quality and left lingering inter-party wounds. The 2001 session saw no significant education legislation and virtually no discussion about education. The inter-party squabbling was remarkably ugly (2001, March 25). *Lexington Herald-Leader*, p. E1. The Prichard Committee and its erstwhile friends also remained quiet during the session. The KEA and the Prichard Committee individually made stands on the issue of improved teacher salaries, a possible item for the regular 2002 session of the General Assembly.

6. Maryland: The Dominance of One Political Coalition

The Authoritative Role of the State Board of Education

In contrast to the history of localism in education governance which characterizes Kentucky, Maryland has a long tradition of centralized direction by policy elites. The governance of K-12 public education in Maryland is strongly influenced by the twelve-member state board of education. Whereas in many states the state legislature has plenary power, in Maryland this authority to establish education policy by rule-setting is invested in the state board of education, which is the most powerful in the country. The members of the board are appointed in by the governor. Given their staggered terms, governors have not easily controlled the board for their own purposes. Moreover, the state superintendent is appointed by the board, not the governor. To some degree, this autonomous authority has endured encroachments by the governor and state legislature in recent years. The governor has the sole authority to set budgets, constrained only by the state legislature's authority to *reduce* his proposals. The fervor over education reform, and the costs associated with funding them inevitably, then, make the state board dependent on these two branches of state government for their adoption. The state superintendent is a cabinet officer, whose department must submit proposals for programs and its own administration just as any other cabinet agency must. Moreover, the governor has appointment power over some local boards of education, as well as fiscal authority over school construction. This gives him considerable potential leverage in influencing local school-district decision making, if he chooses to use his appointment powers and budgetary authority strategically, possibly to advance his priorities independent of the state board of education. Historically, however, this has not been the case for at least two reasons. First, many policy makers believe that it is the role of the state board of education to set policy and find it entirely appropriate that a governor take a secondary leadership role in this policy area. Second, governors involve themselves in local education issues at the peril of being accused of intruding in local issues. The local politics of education can be treacherous in Maryland, since county boards of commissioners must approve school system budgets and because the local property tax is used largely to support public education. It is less risky for governors to use the state budget to reward political allies with money for new programs or new schools.

Gubernatorial Influence in Setting the Education Reform Agenda

There is another way that governors can shape education policy – through their considerable influence over agenda-setting. In the 1980s governors throughout the country, encouraged by the work of the National Governors Association, led movements to reform their state's public education systems, in the wake of the influential national report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This was how Maryland's reform program was conceived, like developments in many other states, not from inside the educational system but outside it.

In 1987 then-governor William Donald Schaefer was concerned about how well his state's school system was actually performing, despite evidence on standardized, norm-referenced tests that the state's students were doing average or above average compared to the nation as a whole. As a mayor of Baltimore he had shown relatively little interest in public education, apart from efforts to garner more resources from the state for the beleaguered Baltimore public school system. But as governor he found that he had to pay close attention to the vocal complaints of the state's business leaders, including those in Baltimore, about the poor quality of the products of the state's public schools. Not surprisingly he turned to a business leader and close friend to address this problem. Schaefer appointed Baltimore business leader Walter Sondheim, who had led the redevelopment efforts in Baltimore's inner harbor, to chair a Commission on School Performance. The commission argued in its 1989 report that there was little evidence of how well Maryland students were prepared by its public school system to function in the new economy, and made a series of sweeping recommendations for a more accountable and data-based system.

The State Board of Education and State Superintendent as Key Reform Actors

Governor Schaefer turned to the state board to adopt the policies, which reflects the fact that the state board could use its rule-making authority rather than having to turn to the state legislature to adopt the reforms. The subsequent adoption of many of these recommendations by Maryland's state board of education, without the necessity of legislative action, made Maryland one of the first states to adopt high-stakes testing, accountability reporting, and a program of intervention in low-performing schools, all known as the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP). These sweeping changes were adopted by the state board in a series of regulations in 1990, 1991, 1993, and thereafter. The annual reporting of school scores in core subjects in grades 3, 5, and 8 on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) began in 1992. Beginning in 1994 the state declared low-performing schools "reconstitution-eligible" and set in place regulatory requirements to assure improvements. In 1996 a school-rewards program was added (discussed below).

Table IX.2 shows the espoused theory of action upon which these high-stakes accountability policies rest. Most of these assumptions were articulated in deliberations of the state board during the discussions leading to adoption of the policies, and many appear in the formal policies themselves and in public reports. For example, the state widely promulgated principles concerning the capacity of all children to learn and to master rigorous content, along with the obligation of schools to teach such content (Maryland State Department of Education, 2000). They expected these principles to recast the goals of teacher, administrators, school board members, parents, and other stakeholders. Each component of the accountability system - student assessments, standards, intervention in low-performing schools, and school performance rewards also were designed with the intent that they would alter specific practices and lead to intended outcomes, as enumerated in Table IX.2. Taken together, the reforms formed a more or less complementary set of assumptions, and they were known early on as the Maryland

School Performance Program (MSPP). It was the completeness of the accountability system in particular which prompted Education Week (2000) to give the state an "A" grade on this aspect of its reform program.

Table IX.2 - Revealing P-Theory (espoused) Intervention through Maryland's High-Stakes Accountability

Policy Mechanisms	Intended Practices	Intended Outcomes
Assumptions: All children can learn. All children have the right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn. All children shall have a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous content.	Practices will change in response to shared philosophical principles and commitments.	All children will learn. All children will attend schools where they can progress and learn. All children will learn equally rigorous content.
Rigorous student assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 (Maryland School Assessment Performance Program), supplemented by the norm referenced C.T. B. S. in other grades. New end-of-course assessments in core high-school subjects.	Teachers will adapt teaching practices, districts will adapt curricula, and school leaders will focus on building instructional capacity.	70% of Maryland students will perform at the satisfactory level or above on MSPAP. All schools will meet the 70% standard. (No performance goals have been developed for the high-school assessments.)
Core learning goals and content standards.	These will guide redesign of local curricula and teaching practices.	These will lead to meeting the state's performance goal for all schools in the state.
Local reconstitution of low-performing schools and state reconstitution of schools which fail to improve under local reconstitution.	Schools will use required school improvement plans and additional resources, under guidance form local school districts, to improve student performance.	Improvement of student performance on MSPAP to the average of all schools in the state.
School Incentive Reward Program	Schools will work toward improvements in anticipation of receiving additional money for discretionary expenditures; they will focus on improving the performance of students from all racial/ethnic groups and both sexes.	All schools will improve student performance in pursuit of financial rewards, and those receiving rewards will sustain their improvements.

The new accountability policies found an articulate and tough advocate in state superintendent Nancy Grasmick, a Schaefer ally, who assumed her role in 1993. To be sure, the policies had their critics, but they were never able at the adoption stage of these reforms (nor subsequently) to mount a credible attack on the new accountability program. Initially, the advocacy coalition consisted largely of the governor, state superintendent, state board, state business leaders, and key members of the media such as *The Baltimore Sun*. Some members of the state legislature also were vocal supporters.

The new program was not popular with many in the education community. The Maryland State Teachers Association (MSTA) was an early critic of many aspects of the reform, although it claimed to be supportive of the overall goal of improving the quality of the state's public school system. The reconstitution provisions were especially onerous in the eyes of many in Baltimore, including the Baltimore Teachers Union, who felt that their schools would be singled out and blamed for failure. Yet the reforms were propelled forward by the Greater Baltimore Committee, representing Baltimore's business leaders, by the Maryland Business Roundtable, and most significantly, by Governor Schaefer.

In 1994, due to term limitations, a new governor was elected. Parris Glendening, while a Democrat like Schaefer, came from a different wing of the party and from Prince George's County, a jurisdiction which was challenging Baltimore's long time hegemony in state politics. Glendening had strong support from the state teachers association and had made a campaign promise to eliminate MSPP if elected. It was rumored that privately he would work to see Nancy Grasmick ousted, and it was true that they had a frosty relationship ever since she was highly critical of him in a *Baltimore Magazine* article during his primary campaign. Whatever his personal feelings toward the state superintendent, however, after he was elected, the new governor was forced to recant on his campaign promise by a unified state board, pronouncing his enthusiastic support for the new education reforms. MSTA now denies that there ever was such a bargain or that it opposed the reforms.

This tension between the governor and state superintendent became, if anything, exacerbated with time. Grasmick and her allies have continued to worry about the governor's ability to undercut her with his power to appoint new members to the board. Several years ago Glendening refused to reappoint the president of the state board Christopher Cross, who was reputed to have committed a major *faux pas* by upstaging the governor during a visit by President Clinton to Annapolis. Yet until his two recent appointments, the governor did not appear to make opposition to the state superintendent a litmus test for his appointees. However, his two new appointees since 2000 have injected controversy to the board's deliberations, questioning the state superintendent's policies, and splitting votes which previously were uncharacteristic of the state board. So concerned were Grasmick's supporters on the state board that they renewed her contract a year early in 2000 before the new board members were seated. Thus, at best the governor's working relationship with the state superintendent has been a tense one.

In these circumstances, with tensions between the two key players in the advocacy coalition supporting the reforms, the leadership for MSPP has come from the state superintendent and her department. The governor had no aide primarily assigned to elementary and secondary education for many years, until his appointment of retiring

MSTA president Karl Pence as his key education aide in 2000. He was more interested in school construction, for which he took much credit in his 1998 reelection campaign.

Grasmick has been especially skillful in building and maintaining a base of support in the legislature, independent of the governor. Two of her staunchest allies are the chairs of two of the most powerful committees, Pete Rawlings, in the Appropriations of the House of Delegates, and Barbara Hoffman, on the Senate Budget Committee.

Perhaps the only notable example of gubernatorial activism on education reform, where he and the state superintendent reached a rapprochement, was the governor's proposal to initiate a financial incentives program as part of MSPP beginning in 1996. Initially the state board resisted his efforts, but he was able to prevail in the state legislature. The state superintendent quickly treated the program as an integral part of the MSPP program. In fact, both Grasmick and the governor are present at the annual celebration where schools receive checks for their improved performance. The rewards program has added a positive element in what otherwise has been an accountability program which involves much frustration and sometimes negative publicity when test scores are released each fall. Thus both state officials have benefited politically from this addition to the accountability policies.

Normally, however, support for the accountability reforms has come from other members of the advocacy coalition, led by Grasmick and including business leaders, key legislators, influential members of the media, and the eventual acquiescence of the educational establishment. Despite their initial resistance, educators are now largely supportive of the reforms, although many grumble privately about what they perceive as the state department's sometimes heavy-handed approaches.

Explaining the Persistence of the Dominant Coalition

How can we explain the persistence of this coalition over such a long period? First, Grasmick's strong leadership must be credited. She has won over critics with her articulate and unswerving devotion to the principles undergirding the reforms, that all children can learn and that it is the responsibility of schools to help them progress and master high standards. She has built a broad consensus beneath her reforms, by employing a skillful strategy of gradualism, maintaining accessibility and a willingness to listen, and making it a practice to reward those who are loyal supporters of state policies. While there was no competing advocacy coalition, there have been an abundance of competing ideas about how to extend the accountability system and how to implement it. She has skillfully incorporated elements of these criticisms or found ways to accommodate her critics.

One strategy has been to provide a regular forum at which she can learn what concerns superintendents have and what they are hearing. She meets monthly with the state's 24 superintendents, listening to their concerns and selling her agenda. The meetings are open to outsiders only by invitation.

Moreover, Grasmick has created a considerable number of task forces to advise the state superintendent and state board on a variety of issues. These involve a wide representation of stakeholders from whom the state superintendent can get feedback, although their membership is carefully selected. Until recently, none of these task forces directly assessed the state accountability system. A current task force is examining what direction the entire state policy system should take over the next decade and is soliciting feedback widely to inform its deliberations.

This "on-the-ground" strategy of implementation has allowed Grasmick to shift her foci and rhetoric as new problems emerged. One persistent complaint has been that the information from MSPAP arrives too late to be helpful in planning for the next school year; the exam is given each spring but the results are not available until late in the fall. Grasmick moved the reporting date up modestly. Teachers and principals complain that test results do not give them any clues as to how they can improve, that they are trying everything with little or no improvement. In response, the state began to talk about improving "instructional capacity" and launched initiatives to achieve this, including requiring school districts to focus all their professional development activities to foster that goal. Parents complained that MSPAP does not provide individual scores, only those for an entire grade. Initially the state planned to release individual scores, but the psychometric problems led the state department to another solution, use of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, a standardized, norm-referenced test, as a supplement to MSPAP. As the national policy discussions began to focus on "the minority achievement gap," the state department of education released a report highlighting this problem and incorporated a requirement that any school eligible for a financial reward under its rewards program must show improvement among all racial subgroups in the school. In these and many other respects, the state board under Grasmick's leadership has fine-tuned the policy framework both to lessen opposition and to make the program more effective.

A second explanation for the persistence of the coalition is that while Maryland's accountability policies were among the first in the country, they were not introduced all at once. The reconstitution provisions, for instance, were not passed until 1993 and began the following year. The state board did not move to introduce new high-school core learning goals and assessments until the late 1990s, and they are only now being piloted with no determination as to whether they will be required for graduation. This incrementalist strategy has given teachers, administrators, and local school district officials opportunities to adapt to the reforms. Responding to initial criticism that the assessments were imposed top-down with little local involvement, state officials involved hundreds of teachers in designing the Maryland Learning Outcomes and content standards, as well as in the scoring of portions of MSPAP each summer. Many principals encouraged this volunteerism because it gave members of their staffs opportunities to understand better how their school could perform well on the test. The incrementalist strategy has also given reluctant or recalcitrant local school districts time to decide to "get on board." Lofty and politically powerful Montgomery County ignored MSPAP for many years and even argued in a impolitic manner that aligning its curriculum to MSPAP could water-down quality. However, Montgomery County school officials reversed themselves by the late 1990s when their school system began performing poorly on the exam compared to other "peer" school systems.

Perhaps the major dispute which has threatened to undercut the program's credibility and unravel the advocacy coalition is the issue of academic intervention for students at risk of failure. Criticism of the standards-based reforms mounted in the late 1990s as it was pointed out by the American Federation of Teachers (1997) and others that only a small number of states were providing extra support to students, particularly those most likely to fail, to help them meet the new standards. The issue came to a head in Maryland when some members of the state board insisted that they would not move forward with the new high-school assessments unless a remediation plan beginning in the elementary or middle-school years were part of the high-school reform package. In December, 1997 the state board authorized the development of exit exams in core content areas as part of the new high school improvement program. Shortly thereafter in January, 1998, pursuing this logic of a tight coupling between the exit exams and remediation policies, the state board passed a resolution calling for the state department of education to put in place a comprehensive K-12 program of intervention assistance for students not succeeding in reading or mathematics or in one of the tested content areas. The resolution also focused on the need for new professional development programs to give teachers the skills necessary to help students who are not succeeding, as well as actions pertaining to adequacy of teacher education programs.

Grasmick convened a task force to develop recommendations and issued a report and *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner* (1999), which the state board adopted in October, 1999. However, the state board has been unsuccessful in getting the governor to fund the $49 million it requested to fund the plan. The governor did not dispute the need for such a plan or the research which supports it. Instead, he argued for reallocation within the existing state education budget, which triggered an angry response from a prominent state board member, Ed Andrews, that the governor's position was an insult to K-12 educators. In the 2001 budget the governor again declined to provide funds to finance the plan, despite a recommendation from a state commission studying the state education finance system and support from a wide variety of education interest groups. This standoff reflects the underlying adversarial tenor of the policy dialogue in Maryland. Despite the state board's use of data to document its needs, the governor has the authority on budget matters to ignore those arguments. The dominance of one advocacy coalition on standards-based reform is missing a key player, the governor, who can frustrate the decade long momentum in support of standards-based reform.

A new advocacy coalition has not emerged, however, to give a broader, coherent critique of the current policies and to lend legitimacy to the governor's concerns. Indeed, on record the governor remains an ardent supporter of MSPP. Since the governor is in his last term, the key question may be who the next governor will be, and that individual's commitment to MSPP. Yet there are other tensions which have nothing to do with the governor, but which signal that the accountability program may face significant challenges in the future. There is growing restiveness about MSPAP. The influential Abell Foundation, chaired by former state-board president Robert Embry, commissioned a highly critical study of MSPAP, which argued that the exam's content is lacking in rigor. Grasmick vigorously defended the exam and argued that the reviewers were handpicked conservatives biased against the constructivist underpinnings of the MSPAP exam. Further, she has faced increasing opposition from some of the governor's new appointments to the state board on a number of policy issues relevant to MSPP.

The Special Problems of Reconstitution as Remediation for Low-Performing Schools

One of the greatest challenges state officials have faced is to bring fruitful results form the state's reconstitution policies. Based on the comparative data provided in Table IX.3, it can be seen that only two schools, out of over a hundred designated for local reconstitution, have successfully exited from probationary status. To do so, they must perform at the state average for percent of students scoring at the satisfactory level or above on MSPAP, which currently is about 45 percent. Four schools have been moved from probation to reconstitution, indicating that probation failed to improve performance at all. Many schools still on the probation list have improved to some degree, particularly recently, and a smaller number have sustained those improvements over two or more years. However, their progress has not been marked enough to meet the exit standard set by the state board. This performance compares unfavorably with Kentucky, where most of the schools exited from the state's list of schools in decline or crisis, until 1998, when the intervention policies were suspended temporarily to be replaced by a new set of policies. Ironically, the Maryland policies have proven more sustainable, even if it is doubtful that they could be called successful.

Table IX.3: State Defined Measures of Success

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">KENTUCKY</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Three rounds of state assistance (STAR Program) to schools with lowest rate of improvement, 1992-1998:
1993-96: 53 schools
1995-98: 250 schools
Repeaters from **1994-96**: 16 schools
1998 no new schools
Repeaters from **1994-96**: 4 schools
Repeaters from **1996-98**: 8 schools
High success rate: Only 4% did not move off list.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">MARYLAND</th></tr>
<tr><th>Local Reconstitution</th><th>Added</th><th>Exited</th></tr>
<tr><td>1994</td><td>2 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1995</td><td>3 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1996</td><td>37 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1997</td><td>10 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1998</td><td>37 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>1999</td><td>9 schools</td><td>1 school</td></tr>
<tr><td>2000</td><td>0 schools</td><td>1 school</td></tr>
<tr><td>**Total**</td><td>**110 schools**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><th>State Reconstitution</th><th>Added</th><th>Exited</th></tr>
<tr><td>2000</td><td>3 schools</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2001</td><td>1 school</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**Total**</td><td>**4 schools**</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">**Low success rate: 2% exited**</td></tr>
</table>

We believe that the main explanation is that the overwhelming number of schools under local reconstitution, and all under state reconstitution, have been from Baltimore City, and this led to reconstitution being seen as largely as a "Baltimore problem" not affecting most school systems. This has narrowed the collateral political damage the state board has suffered from criticisms of its reconstitution policies. State officials readily admit that the politics of reconstitution have been, for the most part, quite simple. There has been a clear constituency for such policies, mainly from the business community. One of the citizen advocacy groups which favors the policy, Advocates for Children and Youth, a statewide group funded largely by the Abell Foundation in Baltimore, has been critical of the state board for not doing more to improve low-performing schools.

The main opponents of the policy at the time of its establishment were employees of Baltimore City Public School System and local advocacy groups, including Mayor Kurt Schmoke. However, their opposition was counterbalanced by the vocal support of the Baltimore business community, which had been arguing since the early 1990s for state intervention. The opponents also were distracted by the protracted battle from 1993 to 1997 between state and local officials over school funding. The ACLU, and later city officials, took the state to court in a school finance challenge in 1995, and the state countersued.

Meanwhile, Del. Pete Rawlings had used his influence in the state legislature to highlight the misspending and waste in BCPSS. Rawlings blamed the management culture of the school system, which he believed preceded Black control. It represented a "culture of complacency," he claimed, oriented toward the status-quo, protectionist, turf-oriented, top heavy, and one where people got jobs and held them based on friendship and loyalty rather than merit and performance. He contrasted this culture with that in the private sector. As a result, he decided to commission a management study of BCPSS by the general management consulting firm of Towers Perrin/Cresap . When the report was issued, it was a scathing critique of the management of BCPSS - its organization, its culture, and in many cases the competence of individuals in the BCPSS bureaucracy. A long list of recommendations and strategies (totaling 101) accompanied the report.

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Rawlings used his influence as a legislative leader to keep pressure on the school system in 1993 and 1994, threatening to withhold two percent of the state share of BCPSS funding for current expenses until BCPSS agreed to enter into a three-year agreement with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to monitor the implementation of the Cresap recommendations. Hearings held before the legislature in 1994 indicated little progress in implementation. In September 1994 MGT of America, a Florida consulting firm, was retained. The following January MGT issued its report indicating that 39 of 53 major Cresap recommendations had not been implemented. In 1995 the legislature's confrontation with BCPSS escalated when $5.9 million of Baltimore city's state education aid appropriation was withheld, pending implementation of a system wide personnel evaluation system. These political pressures, combined with the impending lawsuit (to which a special education advocacy group also was a party, suing BCPSS), led to a partnership agreement between the state and BCPSS in 1997. It was an alternative to a state takeover and essentially provided for radical restructuring of BCPSS governance and management in return for more state aid.

This battle was essentially won by the state and left little room for Baltimore school officials to resist the reconstitution policies. The dispute over additional state aid, in fact, provided state officials, including the governor, with the political cover they needed; they could point to Baltimore's mismanagement as evidence that the problem of low-performing schools was not essentially a fiscal problem or a problem in a few isolated schools, but rather represented a crisis of systemic magnitude - a broken school system which had to be fixed.

The pressure the state board has felt is to strengthen its reconstitution policies. This led the state superintendent to restructure the state's supervision of the schools under local probation and to place greater focus on assisting rather than merely monitoring them. Requirements for a school improvement plan were scaled down. The state also decided to reconstitute three schools in 2000. Here Grasmick has moved cautiously, wishing to see whether the contracts given to Edison Schools will improve performance before committing to reconstitute a larger number of schools or to move forward with further contracting. Indeed, in 2001 the state board decided to reconstitute a fourth school in Baltimore, but to give discretion to the local superintendent Carmen Russo in how the school will actually be reconstituted. The state superintendent essentially ignored objections of the Baltimore Teachers Union, whose own internal conflicts had left it ill-equipped to mount resistance.

Politically, the reconstitution threat has been a potent political tool for the state board, even if it has not shown dramatic educational success. It has been used as a "wake-up" call to local boards that they cannot tolerate failure. The state board has turned its eyes to Prince George's County in recent years, as its educational performance has sagged, and in 2001 even put a school in Baltimore County under local reconstitution, a school system once considered a lighthouse district above reproach. Despite new entrants into this dubious status of reconstitution eligibility, the political success upon which the policy continues to rest is to limit intervention to a few districts, thus isolating opponents.

Judging Overall Success

Apart from its durability as a policy, how successful has MSPP as an overall policy been? We believe policies should be judged according to three criteria: effectiveness, coherence, and reasonableness. As for effectiveness, state and local officials can point with pride to progress in the percentage of students who score at the satisfactory level of above on MSPAP. Still, the state had to abandon its 70 percent goal by 2000, and at present only 45 percent of students statewide perform accordingly. Moreover, only 30 percent of the state's schools meet the 70 percent goal. The state argues that falling short of a goal is fine when the goal is set at a high level which challenges the entire state. That the accountability system has unified the entire state behind a common set of goals and challenged all school systems is undeniable. Still, many teachers find that the policies fall short on the coherence criterion, because the system has narrowed the curriculum and teaching practices. The state argues that teaching to a good test is not a bad thing and that it is the responsibility of local districts to use professional development strategies to change instructional practices. Yet teachers are frustrated that the system only reports test results but does not offer guidance on how to improve school performance. In this respect, they question the reasonableness of the system for the unclear and unrealistic demands it places upon them. It is these underlying issues of effectiveness, coherence, and reasonableness which normally outside the bounds of acceptable policy dialogue. If they were within bounds, they might lead to fundamental questioning of the system which is politically unacceptable to state officials.

7. Conclusion

We have argued that the politics of accountability and school improvement in Kentucky and Maryland have been shaped by the different character of the advocacy coalitions in each state. Kentucky's reforms were shaped by policy elites with the help of the courts, in opposition to a longstanding tradition of local control. This tension eventually led to the emergence of a rival coalition in the 1998 legislative session. Yet this coalition only modified the reforms rather than defeating them entirely, as appeared to be the preference of most actors and most legislators. By 2001 the question can be raised not whether there is organized political opposition to the reforms, because none have surfaced recently, but rather whether there is sufficient public interest and political support for the policies to succeed beyond mere implementation and institutionalization. The policy coalition which created the reforms and has advocated on their behalf will have to reassert its strength for a new momentum behind the reforms to be created.

Maryland has had the benefit of one advocacy coalition throughout the reform period, dominated by a powerful state board and a politically skillful, articulate state superintendent for most of the life of the reform. It has survived insurgent rebellions from the state teachers' union, opposition to its reconstitution reforms from Baltimore City, and regime conflicts between the governor and state superintendent. For the most part, however, the coalition has held steady because of Nancy Grasmick's ability to forge and sustain a broadly-based coalition of outsiders and professional educators who are convinced that the reforms have improved the quality of public education in the state. The legislature has not been a major force as it has in Kentucky, because of the plenary power of the state board, and this has reduced sectional considerations and local resistance which often are best represented within the legislative branch. (One exception was the 1997 legislative battle over the city-state partnership in Baltimore, which required the governor to offer large side-payments to other school districts to assent to the partnership plan giving Baltimore City more state aid.) Maryland's policies are distinctly products of the executive branch, even the dialectic between the governor and state superintendent, in contrast to the major role played in Kentucky by the judicial branch in setting a policy agenda and by the legislature in responding to public pressure to change key features of those policies. To the degree that the legislature has been involved in accountability policies in Maryland, overall it has been supportive of the reforms. While Maryland is dominantly a one-party state dominated by Democrats, reform has not become a Democratic-Republican issue.

The role played by policies addressing low-performing schools has played differently in each state. In Kentucky, opposition to these policies (as well as other aspects of the reforms) formed the nexus of opposition and created an unconventional alliance between teachers and parents. But there were other concerns as well, particularly about the validity of the state assessment system itself, which only served to undercut any claims about the validity of the intervention strategies based on alleged misidentification of low-performing schools. Thus, both the assessment system and the sanction/intervention policies for low school performance were overhauled in response to this opposition.

In Maryland, by contrast, reconstitution, which hardly could be labeled an unequivocal educational success based on the data, has remained politically viable, if unpopular. The key appears to be that unlike Kentucky, few have had their oxen gored, so to speak. Maryland's absolute standard for identifying low-performance focuses only on those school at the bottom of the barrel. In Kentucky the continuous improvement approach to identifying the need for intervention subjected a wide range of schools and districts to adverse publicity, discomfort, and intrusiveness, with poisonous political consequences. This is a clear example of where the details of a policy design do shape political coalitions.

Despite the differences in the policies and the politics of both states, the accountability and school improvement policies persist. But persistence alone is insufficient to guarantee the success of a policy. Momentum in support of the reforms appears to be waning in Kentucky, perhaps due to the weariness of the advocacy coalition which has kept the policies in place for a decade, and because the executive branch's leadership has not filled this vacuum. In Maryland, the center of gravity is the state board and its phenomenal state superintendent. If the state board becomes more divided in the future, or if the state superintendent leaves, the political resources within this unitary coalition may be insufficient to sustain the policies toward eventual success.

One might envision two threats to the long-term success of these policies. One is extinction. Despite their survival thus far, the reforms in both states are the products of a fragile coalition whose continued existence is problematic. In an alternative worst-case scenario, the reforms might not disappear entirely but only be replaced by others which dilute their impact. This is the classic politics of institutionalization, and it is how institutions survive, by accommodating and absorbing the external demands to change them in fundamental ways.

The politics of national education policy will now play a larger role in state education reform than in the past. Today, national elites, both civic and governmental, are vitally interested in education reform. National policies may reinforce the initiatives already in place. These national dynamics may help to sustain the momentum for education reform in both states, which have been cited repeatedly in the national media as examples of what progressive state-policies can accomplish.

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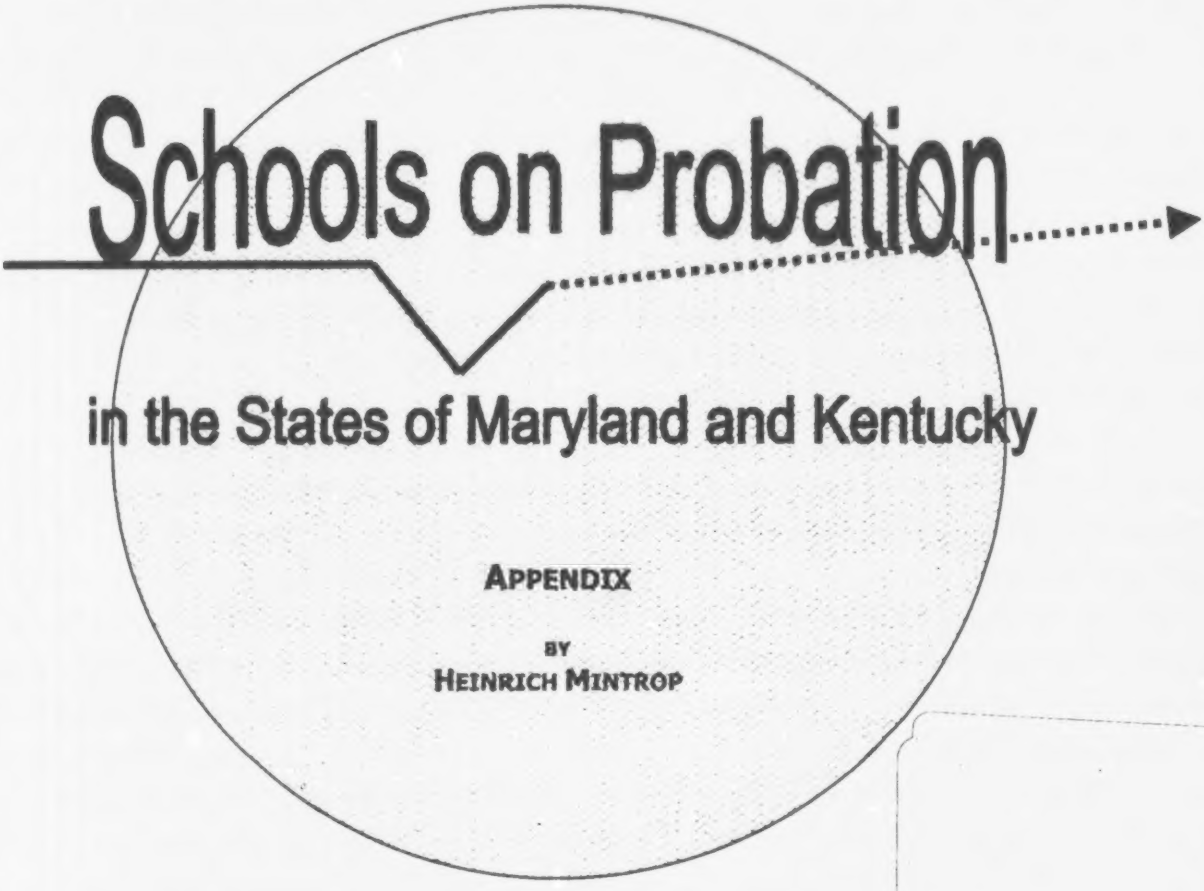

Schools on Probation

in the States of Maryland and Kentucky

APPENDIX

BY
HEINRICH MINTROP

TECHNICAL REPORT
SUBMITTED TO
THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FIELD INITIATED STUDY:
THE EFFECT OF RECONSTITUTION ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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ROAD MAP FOR CASE STUDIES

(School Years 1998/99/00)

Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
I. First round of interviews	9 teachers: 3 highly involved (school improvement coordinator, SIT team chair, test coordinator, or other related function); 6 less involved teachers: 3 with high seniority; 3 new teachers; administrators	Initial reaction Explanation of decline Awareness of RE Description of work environment Reform history Commitment/ motivation Efficacy Control View of test Perception of school strategy Collegiality Probation system evaluation	Initial Interview Guide Oct. 30, 1998
II. School background data	District office, administrators	see separate list	List of data Nov. 1998

Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
III. Observing and understanding the organizational improvement process: Observations of meetings and debriefings for clarification	SIT teams, faculty meetings, administrative teams, departments, etc. [Places where THE PROCESS is strategized] Preferably once a week over the school year, or intense periods alternating with periods of less activity	*Dynamics of the group:* Information flows Inclusion of faculty Inclusion of other stake holders Understanding of process by faculty Active participation Decision making Implementation and enforcement of decisions Leadership style Working teams (in- and out-groups) Getting organized *Issues:* Establishing procedures, rules, standards Forming and following a plan of action Focus Mission/ moral purpose/ spirit of reform Dealing with the tests Staff development Discipline Attendance Instruction , other Top-down/ bottom-up	Observation Guide On-going during school year (Year II of study) concludes summer 1999

Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
IV. The Probation system	State monitors/ DEs / local support staff/ district administrators	Conception of role Understanding of system Qualification for job Analysis of situation Evaluation of effectiveness Accountability to superiors	Interview Guide External Support Staff May 1999

Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
V. Second round of interviews : The implementation of the change design, the role of SIP's	Different group from first round, but same criteria (6 teachers)	Is the SIP and the activities it spells out the blueprint for improvement? Teachers': Knowledge of SIPs Evaluation of plan Buy-in to plan Relevance of plan for improvement Evaluation of staff development/ state monitors, DE's, The teacher's own plan of action or inaction Key activities not in the plan	SIP, Interview guide Dec. 1998

Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
VI. Observing and understanding the process of instructional change and intensification Classroom observations and subsequent debriefings	Per school: 6 teachers: 3 with a reputation of “strong teacher,” 3 with a reputation of “weak teacher” Test-relevant grades 1 teacher of Math and 1 of English if possible	What is the curriculum taught? (official curr. package, teacher-made, etc.) What are the methods employed? (Test adequate?) What is teachers’ rationale? What are the teachers’ problems? What motivates them to provide intense instruction? What motivates them to provide test-adequate pedagogy? What motivates them to change, to stay the same? Where are potentials for performance increase? (Tapped-untapped)	Observation instrument, debriefing guide Six lessons and six debriefings Two observers per lesson
Task	Who	What	Instrument / due date
VII. Third round of interviews (retrospective)	3 Teachers who remained committed 3 Teachers who are rumored to exit Probation functionaries	Reflection of the process What sustained motivation and energy, what sapped it? What worked, what didn’t	Interview guide Open conversation June 1999

CASE STUDY RESEARCH GUIDE **[This guide is an evolving document.]**

SET A: LONGER-TERM

SET B: JUST IDENTIFIED

LEAD AND SUPPORTING QUESTIONS FOR CASE STUDIES:

Individual:

1. Does Probation increase individual motivation to perform?
    a. The affective reaction to the signal (initial and over time)
        i. Perceived fairness and legitimacy of the Probation designation
        ii. Perceived fairness and legitimacy of the accountability measure
        iii. The intensity of fear and threat
        iv. Perceived individual options to exit or meet the challenge

    b. Concept of accountability
        i. What should teachers be held accountable for in their view?
        ii. How do they explain performance lags of the school?

    c. Efficacy
        i. What areas of their work do ts control?
        ii. What is their perceived effect on student behavior and learning?
        iii. Can really all students learn and to what degree does this depend on the teacher?
        iv. Do teachers expect to be successful in mastering the Probation challenge?
        v. What factors or conditions in the school impinge negatively or positively on teachers' sense of efficacy?

2. Does Probation unleash performance potentials/ unused performance reserves based on existing instructional and classroom management and organizational management skills?

    a. Performance potential perceived by teacher (Where do they see room for improving individual performance?)
    b. Perceived by administrator (Where does the principal see room for improvement for his/her teachers?)
    c. How does the researcher assess the instructional, classroom management, and organizational skills of the teacher? Where does the researcher see unused performance reserves?
    d. What in terms of working conditions at school stands in the way of tapping into these potentialities?

3. Does Probation trigger an increase in teacher ability and skills?
    a. What patterns of instructional, managerial, and interactional skill are observable in individual teachers' classrooms?
    b. How do educators perceive their level of preparedness/ skill for the task? (Also efficacy)
    c. Does Probation and the accountability system increase the sophistication with which the teacher analyzes shortcomings (e.g., use of data)?
    d. What kind of staff development does Probation trigger?
    e. What learning initiatives in individual teachers does Probation trigger?
    f. Is there any evidence that additional teacher learning and skills have been applied in the school since Probation?

4. Does Probation increase commitment to the school?
    a. Are ts satisfied with their work?
    b. What do they consider rewards in their work?
    c. Do they expect to reap these rewards in their work at the school?
    d. How do official accountability measures (e.g., test scores, attendance rates) figure in as rewards?
    e. What are the working conditions like? What are the most pressing problems that sap commitment?
    f. How do teachers and administrators cope with the exceptionally high educational load of the school? (If applicable)
    g. How do they make sense of their current status (teaching in a failing/ lagging school, in many cases located in low status communities/ large numbers of impoverished and ethnically/culturally different students and parents)?
    h. Do they intend to stay in the school for the foreseeable future?
    i. Which factors count in favor of staying with the present work assignment, which ones against it?
    j. Did Probation change work satisfaction or commitment to stay?
    k. Which teachers/ groups in the school respond favorably to Probation, which ones negatively?

Organization:

5. Does Probation give impetus to more organizational cohesion?
    a. (For set A) What is the baseline from which the school started re: organizational cohesion (consensus, conflict, open communication, effective governance, work place dictatorship/democracy, areas of common concern)?
    b. Do teachers rally around principal?

    c. Do parents and students rally around the teaching force, or do they prefer to exit the stigmatized school?
    d. Do stake holders' sentiment and action center around a sense of common task?
    e. Do teachers have a sense of organizational accountability?
    f. Do teachers and administrators act as a unit?
    g. Does Probation designation/ status increase divisions among stake holders?
    h. What are the conflicts that arise as a result of Probation?
    i. Who or what groups in the school gain in status or power as a result of Probation, who loses?
    j. Do the forces of reform and vigorous improvement win out?
    k. Are new forms of governance and collegiality put into place?
    l. Are informal ties strengthened?
    m. Is the principal's leadership strengthened or weakened as a result of Probation probation?

6. Does Probation focus schools (ind./org.) on essential reform tasks?
    a. What are the schools' most pressing problems in delivering an effective education, as perceived by school/ as perceived by researchers?
    b. Which areas are identified as the essential reform tasks (if any)?
    c. How does the school intend to deal with, or has dealt with (Set A), management, climate, attendance, instruction, resources, community, external supports?
    d. What evidence of "focusing" exists? (Time spent on specific tasks, comprehensive plan, public reinforcement of importance)

7. Does Probation unleash innovation (ind./ org.)?
    a. What is the school's reform history? (What have they tried? — with what success?)
    b. What is new since Probation?
    c. Do people at the school hold out hope for improvement through innovation?
    d. Is innovation seen as key in improving the school?
    e. What is the scope and scale of innovations tried in classrooms and school-wide?

8. Does Probation lead to a tightening of standard operations?
    a. Does the school teach a comprehensive curriculum across classes? Where does this curriculum break down?
    b. Does the school enforce a discipline code? Where does this discipline code break down?
    c. Does the school maintain a clean and safe environment? What areas are unclean and unsafe?
    d. Does the school follow clear management procedures? In what areas do confusion and disorganization reign?
    e. Does the school actively foster a positive school spirit? Or does the spirit of "doom," "failure," or "indifference" take over?

   f. Who is held responsible for improvements and tightening?
   g. How are staff at the school held accountable?
   h. What operations are tightened up? (E.g., student discipline, supervision, record keeping, teacher work habits, instruction)
   i. Is a particular emphasis or sequence detectable? (E.g., first climate, discipline then instruction)

9. Does Probation lead to personnel changes?
   a. What categories of teachers (seniority in building and profession, certification, educational level, age) are represented (were represented at the beginning of Probation for Set A) at the school?
   b. Has this distribution changed since Probation probation? For the better or for the worse? Which categories of teachers enter (have entered), which categories exit (have exited — Set A)?
   c. Is a particular group of teachers more likely than others to be turned off (leave the school) or to stay committed (see also commitment)?
   d. Have staff perceived a change in student body composition since Probation? (If so, we need student records at some later date.)
   e. Has the school administration or leadership changed since Probation? In what way? Was the change incidental to or a result of Probation?

10. What is the specific effect of Probation policy mandates and supports on the school? (Has to be specified for jurisdiction)
   a. What is the role of the school improvement team?
   b. How is the school improvement plan used in the school? How widely is it known? Is it cited? Is it used as a tool by administrators / teachers / parents to generate action? Is it considered irrelevant? To what degree is it followed or implemented? Which sections have particular importance, which ones are ignored? (Needs analysis, goals, philosophy, activities /strategies, responsibilities), for whom?
   c. What do state monitors do in the school? What is their impact?
   d. What is the importance of the performance test and other ratings that are part of the accountability system? Does it structure educators', parents', students' actions?
   e. What is the effect of public ostracizing of the school for performance insufficiencies?
   f. What is the effect of monitoring and record keeping requirements?
   g. Does the training in Probation (workshops on SIP's, MSPAP, etc.) help the school to tackle their problems?
   h. What does the school do with additional resources disbursed by the state (if any)?
   i. What additional resources from the local system are provided as a result of Probation?
   j. What additional supports from the local system are provided?
   k. Are these perceived as helpful by the school? What do they help with?
   l. How do schools see the role of state, local district, (or the accountability agencies), in

the life of schools? Are they seen as more productive or as more destructive in solving the school's problems?

(Add things as we go along.)

11. Does Probation lead to improvement?
    a. What is the performance history of the school? (Test scores, student attendance, referrals, suspensions, teacher attendance, etc.)
    b. What areas have improved since Probation, as a result of Probation? How are they measured? How are they perceived by the stakeholders in the school?
    c. Do prescriptiveness, administrative guidance, or bureaucratic control of change, that are at the core of the Probation improvement process, trigger ongoing change processes in the school?
    d. Does Probation instill or tap into teachers' commitment to quality education (for in many instances disadvantaged students -- not necessarily the case in KY)? Does it trigger ongoing change efforts?
    e. What are the chances of the school ever exiting the program or shedding Probation probationary status?

In the end, we should have a pretty good sense of the following areas in the life of the school:

1. The baseline conditions of the school
    a. Educational load
    b. Performance history
    c. Reform history
    d. Leadership styles, management of school
    e. Teacher motivation, instructional and classroom management patterns, inferences on teacher abilities, collegial relationships, innovation approach
    f. Specific characteristics of student behavior and learning (as they pertain to school improvement)
    g. Parent involvement
    h. External support

2. The accountability system of Probation (backward-mapped)
    a. The signal
        i. The affective reaction to the signal of Probation (initial and over time / individually and organizationally)
        ii. The strategic reaction to the signal of Probation (Over time / individually and organizationally)
    b. The role of district

    - c. The role of state department of education (where applicable)
    - d. The specific role of mandates and incentives of policy delivery

3. Educational changes over time
    - a. Strategies
    - b. Perceptions
    - c. Outcomes

SCHOOL BACKGROUND DATA FOR CASE STUDIES

Students:

* Performance scores (MSPAP, MFT, KIRIS, CATS)
  in disaggregated and aggregated format
  over time since beginning of assessment system

* Attendance rates over time
* Retention rates over time
* Suspension rates over time
* Other indicators of school performance where available
* Ethnic make up of students

Educational load:

* SES indicator: percent of free and reduced lunch
* Percent of LEP students
* Percent of special education students
* Percent of students in foster care (if figure is available)
* Occurrence of discipline by case categories
* Mobility rates

Teachers:

* Number of teachers
* Years of experience
* Teacher absentee rate (sick days)
* Teacher tardies
* Yearly staff turn-over
    * Number of probationary teachers not likely to get tenure
    * Number of teachers likely to apply for transfer
    * Number of teachers likely to quit
    * Number to transfer and quit in previous years
    * Number of "strong" teachers leaving (ed level, involvement)
* Number of teachers involved in extra duty activities
* Number of teachers involved in school reform efforts
* Number of teachers serving on school governance bodies
* Workday structures

* Percentage of fully certified/ provisional/ substitute teachers
* Educational level of staff
* Ethnic make up of staff

Principal:

* Building seniority of principal
* Educational level of principal
* Work experience of principal

Organization:

* School climate indicators (where available and useful)
* Title I funding: school-wide or targeted assistance
* Status of school in the RE/STAR program (e.g., number of years on probation)
* Size of student population
* Average class size

* Meeting times for teachers
* Governance structure (steering committees, councils, PTA's)
* Control over budget, personnel, student population, curriculum
* Specific or unusual features of the master schedule
* Formats of student groupings (e.g., houses, families etc.)

Probation Policy:

* State school survey
* Local evaluations
* School climate survey
* School improvement plan and preliminary versions
* State monitor reports
* Local monitor or supervisor reports
* List of all meetings with state and local RE personnel (over time: important events)
* Formal / informal structure of improvement process
* Participants in school improvement efforts (SIT team or the like)
* List of all documents to be furnished to the state/ local by the school
* List of all materials the school received from the state
* Budget/ resource allocation for improvement effort
* Role of Title I

INTERVIEW GUIDE I

First Interview (Teacher Version)

Information on research project:

I have come here to talk to you today as part of my involvement in a research project that tries to find out how schools deal with the recent accountability measures that states and local districts in various areas of the U.S. have put into place. We are a research project that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and that is conducted in Maryland and Kentucky. Before I begin asking questions I would like to thank you very much for the time you have taken out to be helpful to our effort. I hope that in time we can reciprocate to help this school. Everything you will say today will be confidential and anonymous. Your school site as well will not be identified through data we gather. At some point. we hope to share our findings with you and the faculty here, but we will make sure that no personal references are made unless you give us explicit permission to do so.

TOPIC/ Question	**CONCEPT/ Answer range**
(INITIAL) REACTION Your school has (recently) been identified as "reconstitution eligible"/ "in decline" by the state. -How do you feel about that?	ACCOUNTABILITY AS ALLY ACCOUNTABILITY AS THREAT ACCOUNTABILITY AS CHALLENGE LEGITIMACY Broad answer range: negative -- positive emotions. (Probe for reasons of strong feelings, mood swings). possibly: -- glad somebody blew the whistle; -- unfair, we are left alone; -- test is not accurate -- skeptical if it can do any good... -- hope for state coming in — if *they* think they can do it better....
Do you fear what might happen to your school or to you yourself as a result of "reconstitution eligibility"/ "in decline" ? [ask directly if applicable: do you fear actual reconstitution/ further penalties for this school?]	I worry I don't care I'll always find something Can only get better

EXPLANATION OF DECLINE/ FAILURE The state says that your school's performance has (recently) declined/ stagnated. How do you explain that to yourself?	EFFICACY OF SELF, OF EDUCATION EXTERNAL -- INTERNAL ATTRIBUTION — low skills of students — tough environment — low impact of ed./ — not a miracle worker — lack of resources, materials — feeling powerless — no control of school — bad colleagues — bad administration — I don't reach the kids enough — I don't know what to do — we at school don't know what to do — we've tried so much — we can make a difference — I have experienced success — sophisticated and specificdata-based analysis of failure
SUBJECTIVE DESCRIPTION OF WORK ENVIRONMENT Give me a brief description of how you see your school (prompt if not volunteered). -students -parents -community -colleagues -administration -resources -organization -relationship to district -feeder schools Name some things that you like very much / where you think you are doing a good job at this school. Name some things that you don't like / where you think this school is not doing a good job. Do you think the school gives you the opportunity to be successful?	PERCEPTIONS AND INFERENCES ABOUT OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES FOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE PERCEIVED NEEDS description — work situation encourages success or failure

REFORM HISTORY In what kinds of school or classroom change projects has the school or you personally been involved in the past?	LEVEL OF AND MOTIVATION FOR INVOLVEMENT
(Pick specific projects) Why did you get involved in (xxx)?	REFORM DRIVEN BY — STUDENT NEED — ADMINISTRATIVE DEMAND — PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY / PERSONAL VALUES
Which ones did you find to be useful, which ones useless?	PHILOSOPHICAL OR ORGANIZATIONAL COHERENCE OF PERSONAL REFORM EFFORTS
When you look over the past projects that you personally or your school have been involved in, how do feel about the fate of "reconstitution"/ "in decline" or the state's/ district' accountability measures? Will it be successful will it fail?	POSITIVE / NEGATIVE ANCESTRY FOR RC EXPECTANCY MOTIVATION DUE TO CONTINUITY OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN SCHOOL REFORM Success: something new Success: already on the road to success Fail: more of the same Fail: nobody has an answer

PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DATA I would like to know a little bit more about you personally as a professional: How many years have you been working - in schools - in this school - in this district What are the subjects/ grades you teach? Were you trained for these subjects? Do you hold a credential? Do you have a special function or job in this school? How well do you feel prepared for (subjects)? If you were involved in a professional development program (as you might already be): - In which areas or topics do you feel strong so that you'd feel comfortable giving a workshop to other teachers? - Can you think of topics in which you would very much feel the need to *receive* workshops or training or support? -- If your school were involved in a prof dev program .....[same as personal question] (Belongs to reform history, but here a good place to ask)	ABILITY TO ACT WORK EXPERIENCE ADEQUACY OF PREPARATION AREAS OF STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS (PERSONAL (Probe for responses with regard to foci of school improvement: student discipline, shared-decision-making, instruction in subject, general pedagogy, performance test, sensitivity to community, etc.) AND SCHOOL)
LEAVING OR STAYING If the opportunity would offer itself to you that you could work at a different school / district, would you take it?	COMMITMENT OR ENTRAPMENT -like this school / kids -have invested here -have too much seniority to leave -nothing available

PERFORMANCE Does it make a difference when you try hard to do a good job as a teacher?	INTRINSIC REWARDS: STUDENT LEARNING, APPRECIATION EXTRINSIC REWARD: SALARY, RECOGNITION BY COLLEAGUES, PARENTS, PRINCIPAL, PRIVILEGES EXPECTANCY OF REWARDS makes /no/ differences
MOTIVATION What makes you go to work every day?	LONG-LASTING SATISFACTION care for children challenge career community
MSPAP/KIRIS/CATS SCORES How important is it for you to increase the school's MSPAP?KIRIS/CATS scores? Why?	VALUES -lifting of public stigma -averting further sanctions -as indicator for increased learning -kids' lives first -academics key -kids' life chances
INITIAL ENVISIONED STRATEGY What are the steps that you think your school is taking now that it is declared RC eligible? What steps are you taking personally?	COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY PIECEMEAL APPROACH OWNING OR SHIFTING BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY STRENGTHENING STANDARD OPERATIONS VS. INNOVATION RIGIDITY VS. EXPERIMENTATION infer from strategies mentioned; probe

ORGANIZATION With the way the state figures the school improvement index, the state holds the whole school accountable for performance. Do you think your school acts as a whole school right now? Do you think your individual contribution makes much of a difference here for the whole school performance picture? Why, why not?	ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE PROFESSIONAL NORMS OF AUTONOMY SHARING AND COLLEGIAL ACCOUNTABILITY -too many poor performers here -we are divided -instruction is individuals' responsibility -leadership vacuum -strong leadership -strong SDM
THE PROBATION PROCESS What has happened in your school since you were identified? What steps have you been involved in? What have the PROBATION (RECON/ STAR) requirements done for the school? Probe on state monitor/ DE/HSE.	AWARENESS AND INITIAL EVALUATION OF RECON SYSTEM -Probe for what informant knows about the system. - Reqirements perceived as positive or negative

INTERVIEW GUIDE II

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY / SIP

Main inquiries:

This instrument aims at illuminating the degree to which teachers "own" the school improvement process, understand their part in it, and are willing and able to play their part. As in the *meeting observation guide* we explore Probation as enabling strategic planning and coordinated action, shaping the faculty's motivation, and the school's programmatic and human development.

To what degree does the school's change design (SIP) become implemented?
Are teachers aware of the change design and do they fulfill their expected roles?
Are strategies and external criteria of success internalized by faculty?
Does Probation shape a school improvement process characterized by compliance, managerial top-down execution, internalization, or some other pattern?

The following concepts are explored:

* Teacher's vision of improvement
* Awareness of the school's strategy
* Teacher's part in school's strategy
* New "technologies" (activities, materials, etc.)
* Implementation of plan
* Internalization of accountability system
* Expectation of success
* Valence of success
* Usefulness of Probation instruments (SIP, monitoring, staff dev., etc.)
* Perception of faculty as a group
* Group accountability
* Faculty coordinated action
* Hierarchical/ collegial decision making

This interview requires familiarity with the school and a detailed knowledge of the school improvement plan. Interviewees should be different from first round informants. You do not have to follow the questions in order. Some interviewers found it useful to ask questions on group accountability before the questions on the school improvement plan.

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Question	**CONCEPT/ answer range**
PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DATA I would like to know a little bit about you personally as a professional: How many years have you been working - in schools - in this school - in this district What are the subjects/ grades you teach? Were you trained for these subjects? Do you hold a credential? Do you have a special function or job in this school? How well do you feel prepared for (subjects)? If you were involved in a professional development program (as you might already be): - In which areas or topics do you feel strong so that you'd feel comfortable giving a workshop to other teachers? - Can you think of topics in which you would very much feel the need to *receive* workshops or training or support?	ABILITY TO ACT WORK EXPERIENCE ADEQUACY OF PREPARATION AREAS OF STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS (PERSONAL (Probe for responses with regard to foci of school improvement: student discipline, shared-decision-making, instruction in subject, general pedagogy, performance test, sensitivity to community, etc.)
How do you envision the school to improve? What steps, in your view, are most important for the school?	TEACHER'S VISION T. formulates his or her **own** ideas.

What was your involvement with the SIP? Do you know what is in the SIP? What would you say are the most important aspects of the SIP? Does the SIP make sense to you? What is left out? What needs to be changed? (Present specific goals and activities from the plan:) Does this goal / activity make sense to you?	AWARENESS OF STRATEGY INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS GOAL CLARITY varying degrees of knowledge and involvement; weak or strong sense of meaningful process; congruence between school plan and personal vision
What is your own part in the school's plan? How does your part fit in with what your colleagues do? Do you feel you are adequately prepared to do your part? What additional skills or resources do you need?	AWARENESS OF STRATEGY GOAL CLARITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS EFFICACY / CONDITIONS OF SUCCESS vague idea of own role vs. clear idea of task and responsibility sees connections between her effort and her colleague's efforts vs. is restricted to her own classroom feels well prepared vs. requests more training and is insecure
What steps have you taken? -will you take in the near future?	IMPLEMENTATION (prompt for specifics from the SIP)
What new materials, technologies, ways of student groupings, procedures, programs have you tried — will you try? Who decided to use these? Why did you select these?	INTERNALIZATION (OF SIP, SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS, EXTERNAL PARTNERS, MONITORS, EXTERNAL SUPPORT STAFF) THEORIES OF CAUSE — EFFECT (discuss specific activities and probe for rationales)
Do you think the steps you are taking will lead to success? Will you be able to achieve the goal laid out in the SIP: (quote from SIP). What makes you optimistic/pessimistic?	EXPECTATION OF SUCCESS It's going to be hard with these kids I have evidence that it's working

How important is it for you to meet the state/district standards? If I was visiting your classroom, how would I see this (importance)?	VALENCE OF SUCCESS (prompt for goals other than achievement) achievement is central to me I like the pedagogy that the assessment implies I believe in pedagogy different from test Educating decent human beings is more important than scores
Does the school have additional resources, personnel, and prof. dev. opportunities as a result of Probation? How has this affected the work in your own classroom/ area? What would happen if these additional resources disappear?	CAPACITY BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY OF CHANGE

The accountability system holds the faculty as a whole accountable for performance. It doesn't make any distinction between strong and weaker teachers, new and senior teachers. Is this fair? Is it working?	GROUP ACCOUNTABILITY We have such high turn-over We are all in this together We help each other I work so hard, should not be judged on the merits of colleagues Kids are educated by the whole school
Do you feel the faculty acts as a unified whole? — More so since the school was put on probation?	GROUP ACCOUNTABILITY COORDINATED ACTION we are divided some have more power than others we stick together
Do you receive all information you want or need? Who makes the important decisions here? Who is in control?	COORDINATED ACTION HIERARCHY COLLEGIAL DECISION MAKING (prompt for examples) answers should give a sense of "improvement by command" vs. "improvement as internal restructuring"
Do you think you have influence over decisions that are made? Is your voice heard? How much do you get involved in whole-school affairs?	
Do you discuss issues of school improvement openly? Can you criticize the plan or the administration or other colleagues of you think something is wrong? Do you agree with the way decision making is handled here? (Particularly with regard to the strategies to get off probation)	

Once decisions are made, are they usually carried out at this school? How much choice do you have in carrying them out? Do you have people in your classroom/ area that tell you what to do? Who sees to it that they are carried out? Have things changed since being put on probation?	IMPLEMENTATION ENFORCEMENT THREAT OF SANCTIONS AUTONOMY/ COORDINATED ACTION Things are disorganized here Everybody does what he/she wants The principal is tough Colleagues are in your face Resource teachers are in the classrooms all the time (Probe for agreements, resentments)
In many schools there are those who are working very hard and others who put in less effort into their work? Is this the case here as well? What happens to those here at this school that are not working as hard?	
Do you think the school benefitted from being put on probation? Has the school benefitted from SIP, monitors, etc. ? (probe for features of accountability system)	USEFULNESS OF ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM AND HIGH STAKES DESIGNS no involvement and no contact with system they play a direct or indirect role in improvement process
If you compare the school the way it is this year / since it was identified as “on probation (probation, etc.) with the way it was before, do you see differences? Will these differences make the school more successful? Explain.	Open response

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
CODES FOR INTERVIEWS I AND II
(to be used in conjunction with the interview guides)

CODE	DESCRIPTION, CONCEPTS, RESPONSES
Professional background (needs to be coded twice: "prof. background" node for all text units and demographic base data nodes: block the whole text)	ABILITY TO ACT, WORK EXPERIENCE, ADEQUACY OF PREPARATION, AREAS OF PERSONAL STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS
Reaction to Recon	ACCOUNTABILITY AS ALLY ACCOUNTABILITY AS THREAT ACCOUNTABILITY AS CHALLENGE LEGITIMACY, FAIRNESS Broad answer range: negative -- positive emotions. (Probe for reasons of strong feelings, mood swings). possibly: -- glad somebody blew the whistle; -- unfair, we are left alone; -- test is not accurate -- skeptical if it can do any good... -- hope for state coming in — if *they* think they can do it better.... I worry I don't care I'll always find something Can only get better
Fairness	Specific reference to fairness: RECON/STAR / accountability fair/unfair
Threat, fear	Specific reference to probation as threat

Explanation of decline	EXTERNAL -- INTERNAL ATTRIBUTION — low skills of students — tough environment — low impact of ed./ — not a miracle worker — lack of resources, materials — feeling powerless — no control of school — bad colleagues — bad administration — I don't reach the kids enough — I don't know what to do — we at school don't know what to do — we've tried so much — we can make a difference — I have experienced success — sophisticated and specific data-based analysis of failure
Description of work environment	Descriptions: -facilities -students -parents -community -colleagues (i.e. teacher colleagues) -administration -organization -district -likes about school -dislikes about school Name some things that you like very much / where you think you are doing a good job at this school. Name some things that you don't like / where you think this school is not doing a good job.
School history	In what kinds of school or classroom change projects has the school or you personally been involved in the past? Why did you get involved? Which ones did you find to be useful, which ones useless?

Leadership style	Refers to text units that refer to the specific aspects of principal, and administrator-teacher relationship
Collegiality	Refers to text units in which teachers describe their relationship to colleagues at the site with regard to cohesion, unity, conflict, collaboration, etc.
Motivation to teach	COMMITMENT, REWARDS, MOTIVATION What makes you go to work every day? Possibly: care for children challenge career community religion faith
Commitment to organization	If the opportunity would offer itself to you that you could work at a different school / district, would you take it? Responses: -like this school / kids -have invested here -have too much seniority to leave -nothing available
Valuing success in accountability system	How important is it for you to increase the school's MSPAP/CATS?KIRIS (etc.) scores? Why? How important is it for you to meet the state/district standards? If I was visiting your classroom, how would I see this (importance)? Responses: I like the pedagogy that the assessment implies I believe in pedagogy different from test Educating decent human beings is more important than scores

Expectation of success in accountability system	Do you think the steps you are taking will lead to success? Will you be able to achieve the goal laid out in the SIP? What makes you optimistic/pessimistic? Responses: It's going to be hard with these kids I have evidence that it's working
Efficacy	Does it make a difference when you try hard to do a good job as a teacher? Covers content that deals with teachers' sense of control to effect changes in student behavior, school performance
Capacity	How well do you feel prepared for (subjects)? If you were involved in a professional development program (as you might already be): - In which areas or topics do you feel strong so that you'd feel comfortable giving a workshop to other teachers? - Can you think of topics in which you would very much feel the need to *receive* workshops or training or support? SIP: Do you feel you are adequately prepared to do your part? What additional skills or resources do you need? Covers content that deals with teachers' (lack of) preparedness, assessments of teachers' skill and expertise (self or described by others)
Awareness/ knowledge of policy (Recon/STAR process)	What has happened in your school since you were identified? What steps have you been involved in? What was your involvement with the SIP? Do you know what is in the SIP? What would you say are the most important aspects of the SIP? Does the SIP make sense to you? What is left out? What needs to be changed? Varying degrees of knowledge; weak or strong sense of meaningful process;

Vision	How do you envision the school to improve? What steps, in your view, are most important for the school? Congruence between school plan and personal vision?
Goal clarity or conflict	covers material that deals with teacher's understanding of the school goals; teachers may point to different and conflicting goals that they have to address. Responses: MSPAP/CATS/KIRIS distracts from basic skills We don't quite know what to do to improve the school We have to do basic skills tests, performance -based tests etc.
Involvement	-- Vague idea of own role vs. clear idea of task and responsibility sees connections between her effort and her colleague's efforts vs. is restricted to her own classroom -- Complies – Actively involved What steps have you taken? -will you take in the near future? Who decided?
Evaluation of policy (Recon/STAR)	Do you think the school benefitted from being put on probation? Has the school benefitted from SIP, monitors, DE/HSEs etc. ? If you compare the school the way it is this year / since it was identified as "on probation (recon, etc.) with the way it was before, do you see differences? Will these differences make the school more successful? Explain.
Compliance, subordination	covers content that deals with teachers being told, being required to do certain things; deals with teachers' disposition to comply sometimes against better judgment.
RECON / IN DECLINE as label/ shame	covers content that deals with the label, stigma, status of Recon, and reactions of shame
Performance measures/ MSPAP/KIRIS/CATS	covers content that deals with teachers' response to MSPAP and other performance measures

Accountability/ group accountability	Individual: Are teachers feel they are held accountable for what they are doing in their classrooms? Group: The accountability system holds the faculty as a whole accountable for performance. It doesn't make any distinction between strong and weaker teachers, new and senior teachers. Is this fair? Is it working? Do you feel the faculty acts as a unified whole? — More so since the school was put on probation? Responses: We have such high turn-over We are all in this together We help each other I work so hard, should not be judged on the merits of colleagues Kids are educated by the whole school

Decision making	Do you receive all information you want or need? Who makes the important decisions here? Who is in control? Do you think you have influence over decisions that are made? Is your voice heard? How much do you get involved in whole-school affairs? Do you discuss issues of school improvement openly? Can you criticize the plan or the administration or other colleagues of you think something is wrong? Do you agree with the way decision making is handled here? (Particularly with regard to the strategies to get off probation) Once decisions are made, are they usually carried out at this school? How much choice do you have in carrying them out? Do you have people in your classroom/ area that tell you what to do? Who sees to it that they are carried out? Have things changed since being put on probation? Responses: Things are disorganized here Everybody does what he/she wants The principal is tough Colleagues are in your face
SIP / planning	What was your involvement with the SIP? Do you know what is in the SIP? What would you say are the most important aspects of the SIP? Does the SIP make sense to you? What is left out? What needs to be changed? (Present specific goals and activities from the plan:) Does this goal / activity make sense to you? What is your own part in the school's plan? How does your part fit in with what your colleagues do?
Strategies	covers all material dealing with the school's strategy (see interview guides for details)
Resources	Does the school have additional resources, personnel, and prof. dev. opportunities as a result of RECON/STAR? How has this affected the work in your own classroom/ area? What would happen if these additional resources disappear?

External monitoring and support	covers content that has to do with state monitors, DE/HSEs, district personnel, external projects, programs, consultants

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY

Data consist of:

* Lesson observations
* Debriefing interviews following the lessons

Main questions:

1. Does the teacher reach students effectively?

2. Is the observed teaching adequate to the development of skills needed for performance-based tests, such as MSPAP/KIRIS/CATS, or for other tests?

3. How does the teacher reflect on his or her teaching? Does the teacher feel the need to change in the area of curriculum and instruction?

4. How does the teacher deal with the gap between external peformance expectations and student performance?

5. What factors help or hinder the teacher to improve teaching? --- Are factors related to probation / accountability?

6. Do the "good" teachers reach out to colleagues, or vice versa the weaker ones to stronger ones at the school? [This is actually related to the domain of organizational development.]

Dimensions of lesson observations:

* Classroom layout
* Topic

* Activities
* Main questions
* Discernible objective
* Test-specific activities
* Materials
* Conceptual level
* Forms of interaction
* Monitoring/ enforcement
* Student on-task behavior
* Motivation
* Discipline
* Tone

YOU WILL NOTE OBSERVATIONS TO THE LAST TWELVE OBSERVATION DIMENSIONS IN FIVE SNPSHOTS DURING THE LESSON.

Specifications of dimensions:

*** Classroom layout**
Bright/orderly?
Seating arrangement: rows/ table groups?
Recent student work displayed?
Test-related artifacts displayed (e.g., MSPAP words, posters, etc.)
Print-rich environment
Technology

*** Topic**
Is there a central topic of the lesson?
(E.g., a story, a mathematical axiom, a rule, a skill)

*** Activities**
Activities are task segments that combine a conceptual or cognitive operation with specific content material carried out in particular social arrangements. Under *activities* we describe the surface of event segments as a whole. Main activities are: listening, reading, writing, answering questions, making lists or charts, drawing, dialoguing, memorizing, conducting experiments, observing, The following elements break up this synoptical view and ask you to infer from your observations.

*** Test-specific activities**
Note activities that are directly related to tests: test vocabulary drills; reference to specific items or tasks; raising test motivation, etc.

*** Main question**
Is the lesson or lesson segments guided by questions?

*** Content**
Note the content of the lesson segment and the level of difficulty of content (i.e. whether students exhibit to be challenged by the content).

*** Discernible objective**
Objective refers to what the teacher intends students to learn: for example, in reading a story the difference between morally good and bad; in drilling multiplication a better command of multiplication tables, etc.. The question is if an adult is able to discern this objective by observing the lesson.

*** Materials**

Textbooks, worksheets, text copies, magazines, novels, visuals, films, (utensils for) experiments, etc.

*** Student product**

Note what the students are to produce, complete, turn in.

*** Conceptual level**

- Factual recall
- Drill and practice
- Comprehension (summarizing, paraphrasing)
- Application
- Generalization
- Problem-solving (goes beyond imitating a modeled solution)
- Evaluation

*** Forms of interaction**

Whole group:

Teacher lecture

- T lectures/ gives longer explanation
- T demonstrates (e.g., extended form of modeling)

Student presentation

- S gives presentation on findings
- S presents answers from homework / exercises

Teacher-student dialogue

- Clarification (S asks question/ T gives explanation)
- Recitation (T asks question about a topic/short factual student answer/teacher evaluative comment/new T question)
- Modeling (T gives brief explanation followed by S questions or brief response)
- Brainstorming (T or S prompt elicits a number of student responses)

- Deliberation (T or S prompt elicits a number of student responses, the veracity of which is deliberated; students respond to each other.)

Partner work

carried out on different conceptual levels with different forms of student-student dialogue (see above: clarification, brainstorming, deliberation)

Group work

carried out on different conceptual levels with different forms of dialogue (see above)

Silent seat work

Note the conceptual level of the task (i.e. check the questions students are to answer)

*** Monitoring/ enforcement**
How does the teacher monitor and enforce students' work intensity?
Particularly: is there evidence for homework completion?

*** Student on-task behavior**
Note approximately how many students are on task during the lesson segment: a few, a quarter, half, three quarters, almost all.

*** Motivation**
Note your perception of emotions prevailing in class: excited, interested, compliant, resistant
Is there evidence of any specific motivational strategy or activity employed by the teacher?

*** Discipline**
Note any apparent infractions and teacher's reaction to it. Rate: orderly, occasional disruptions, frequent disruptions, out of control.

*** Tone**
Note your perception of teacher's tone. Rate: effusive, warm, respectful, professional, firm, distant, disdainful, irritated, harried, screaming

Ratings:

In observing a lesson we want to get a sense of the overall quality of the lesson and the degree to which it is adequate to the performance-based pedagogy of MSPAP and other tests.

Basic Level

Is the lesson coherent?
Does the format vary?
Are students on task, motivated, disciplined, and monitored to put out work ?
Are skills or content to be learned by students identifiable?

Elaborate Level

Do students engage in higher-order thinking?
Do they engage in problem-solving?
Do they work independently in teams?

After observing the lesson and filling out the long form, you will rate the lesson on a point scale. Only the point scale will be entered into a computer data base.

DEBRIEFING INTERVIEW

Biographical info:

PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DATA	ABILITY TO ACT
I would like to know a little bit more about you personally as a professional: How many years have you been working - in schools - in this school - in this district What are the subjects/ grades you teach? Were you trained for these subjects? Do you hold a credential? Do you have a special function or job in this school? How well do you feel prepared for (subjects)? If you were involved in a professional development program (as you might already be): - In which areas or topics do you feel strong so that you'd feel comfortable giving a workshop to other teachers? - Can you think of topics in which you would very much feel the need to *receive* workshops or training or support?	WORK EXPERIENCE ADEQUACY OF PREPARATION AREAS OF STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS (Probe for responses with regard to foci of school improvement: student discipline, instruction in subject, general pedagogy, performance test.)

- How typical would you say is the lesson for your teaching style? - What was your objective for the lesson? - Can you briefly summarize what you think happened during the lesson? - How did the students do? Where was the lesson successful? - Are there areas where you feel the lesson fell short or where your students should have done better? - Would you teach the lesson in the same way again? - [in case teacher is not novice] Have you taught this lesson before in the same way/ differently?	CROSS-REFERENCING OBSERVATION AND TEACHER'S CONCEPTION ANALYTIC ABILITY INDICATION OF FLEXIBILITY (PERHAPS: WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE OR LEARN
- Have you changed anything in the way you teach this topic or lesson since MSPAP/KIRIS/CATS (other tests) came around? // since Probation came around? - How does the lesson fit into the official district curriculum? - How does the lesson address skills and knowledge that your students need? - How does the lesson address skills and knowledge to be successful on MSPAP/MFT/CATS/KIRIS etc.? **How do you set your own standards?**	EFFECT OF ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM ON TEACHING

Prompt for possible changes if it becomes apparent that the lesson does not address needs or if the teacher indicates that he/she needs to improve the lesson: - What changes would you make? - What would you need to make those changes? - What stands in the way? - Is there anything the school, the district, or the state could do to help you make these changes? - Does MSPAP/CATS/KIRIS, Probation, the professional development you participated in, have anything to do with the way you teach?	WILLINGNESS AND CAPACITY TO MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGES ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHER LEARNING

- Do you talk with colleagues about the way you teach? - Are you observed in your classroom by principal, monitor, colleagues, do you get feed-back? - Are you asked for help by other colleagues?	CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING AT SCHOOL: COLLEGIALITY, SUPERVISION
– This school has been identified as RECON-eligible/ in decline and the teachers here are charged with raising student achievement: -- What needs to be done for you to reach that goal in your classroom? -- What needs to be done for the school to reach that goal? - What are the chances of success? – Has RECON/ in decline helped in improving teaching here at school? How about your own classroom?	CONNECTING TEACHER'S CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION WITH WHOLE-SCHOOL STRATEGIES

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY

SCHOOL FORM

ID#:____

SCHOOL: ____________________________________

DATE: __________________TIME:__________PROB.STATUS:___________

TEACHER: ______________________________CLASS:__________________

SUBJECT:________________TOPIC:______________________

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: _____________

OBSERVERS: ______________________ and ____________________

Observer:____________________

CLASSROOM LAYOUT:____________________________________

Bright/Orderly?____________________________________

Seating arrangement : rows/table groups?____________________

Recent study work displayed?____________________________

Test-related artifacts displayed (e.g., MSPAP words, posters, etc.)____________

Print-rich environment?______________________________

Technology:____________________________________

STUDENT PRODUCTS (AT END OF LESSON):

Lesson Observation Write-Up

LESSON SEQUENCE

Minutes	Activity	Concept	Material	Form of Interaction

Min utes	Activity	Concept	Material	Form of Interaction

Observation code #:

Observations on:	Snapshot 1 Time:	Snapshot 2 Time:	Snapshot 3 Time:	Snapshot 4 Time:	Snapshot 5 Time:
Activities					

Main question					
Discernible objective					
Test activities					
Materials					
Conceptual level					
Content difficulty					
Forms of interaction					

Monitoring					
Students on task					
Student motivation (emotion)					
Teacher motivation strategy					
Discipline					
Tone					

The ratings of snapshots are:

Basic Level

Coherence of lesson plan	(3) Beginning, middle, and end hang together (2) common thread, but breaks (1) little coherence, unconnected snapshots
Evidence of simple cognitive skill or content to be learned	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three or more snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Content or task underchallenges student	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three or more snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Evidence of simple test taking skills	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three or more snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Variety of activities	(3) three or more activities (2) at least one activity change (1) one activity for a whole lesson
Variety of forms of interaction	(3) three or more forms (2) at least two kinds of interaction (1) no variety
Variety of material	(3) three or more types of material (2) at least two types of material (3) no variety
On-task (overall during the lesson)	(5)almost all (3) half (1) few (4) three quarters (2) a quarter
Discipline	(4) orderly, (3) occasional disruptions, (2) frequent disruptions, (1) out of control
Motivation	(4) excited (3) interested, (2) compliant, (1) resistant
Tone (no rank order)	(10) effusive, (9) warm, (8) respectful, (7) professional, (6) firm, (5) distant, (4) disdainful, (3) irritated, (2) harried, (1) flustered
Teacher explanation of content	(1) very clear (3) unclear (2) clear (4) very unclear

Elaborate Level	
Evidence of: higher-order thinking (above comprehension)	(4) four or more snapshot (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Problem solving	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Work in teams	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Real life application (Connecting to students' experience)	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Challenging difficulty of content	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot
Dialogue Complexity (Evidence of deliberation)	(4) four or more snapshots (3) three snapshots (2) two snapshots (1) one snapshot (0) no snapshot.
Grade level adequacy (Estimate)	(3) above grade level (2) at grade level (1) more than one grade level below (0) more than two grade levels below
Test adequacy (Complex performance based activity for MSPAP and CATS)	(4) four snapshots, (3) three snapshots, (2) two snapshots, (1) one snapshot, (0) no snapshot.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

MONITORS / EXTERNAL SUPPORT STAFF / PROGRAM OFFICER / [adjust to DE/HSE]

(Questions need to be adjusted to specific role. Not all questions need to be asked. Just make sure the concepts are covered.)

Main research questions:

Does the design of the accountability system with the creation of specific roles for external supervisory and support staff influence the school improvement process in a patterned way?

Sub-questions:

What are the main design features of the accountability system?
What additional human and material resources accompany probationary status?
How effective is the design?
How does external staff see their role in the process?
How are external supervision, authoritative change agentry, and internal capacity development balanced?
Is accountability constructed as reciprocal between accountability and schools?

CONCEPTS:
Accountability system design
Design effectiveness
Conception of role
Supervision
Capacity building
Change agentry
Expertise
Authority
Responsibility to accountability agency
Reciprocal accountability

Question	**CONCEPT / answer range**
How much contact do you have with (this school) (schools on probation)? Who do you talk to when you visit? What do you observe?	SYSTEM DESIGN CONCEPTION OF ROLE range from being infrequent monitor/ symbolic presence to deeply engaged work through the principal and her lieutenants or whole faculty
What do you see happening at this school in terms of school improvement? What steps does this school / schools on probation have to take? What particularly helpful steps has the school taken so far? What will make it difficult for this school to be successful? What additional resources has the school received as a result of RECON/Probation/STAR? What is this school doing with additional resources as a result of RECON/ Probation/STAR? How does this school differ from other schools that you deal with?	EXPERTISE (probe for depth of analysis and insight) (This is also an opportunity to learn about your case through the eyes of an outsider with a different perspective.)

What steps will you take with this school / do you take with schools on probation? How do you see your role vis-a-vis the school? How much do you get involved? Are you primarily a monitor who oversees or a change agent who makes concrete suggestions? Do you use specific instruments, tools, data bases for your analysis? Do you write up reports? Do you use specific forms for these write-ups? Do you give feed-back to the school? How do you do that?	CONCEPTION OF ROLE SUPERVISION CHANGE AGENTRY SYSTEM DESIGN
How responsive is the school to your reports/ suggestions? Does the school resent/ accept / welcome your presence? Do you have special authority due to your role? Can you override the wishes of the school?	AUTHORITY (Probe for examples.)
Tell me about your background. How did you end up with this job? What is your experience in doing this kind of work? Did you go through special training? What did you learn? Did you o through a special selection process?	EXPERTISE
How effective is the state's / district's accountability system? What can somebody in your role accomplish? What needs to be changed to make it more effective?	SYSTEM DESIGN EFFECTIVENESS OF DESIGN range from "drop in the bucket" to "sting" to "help the school to get organized"

Do you work independently or are you part of a team? How is your work evaluated by (the accountability agency/ by the local / by the school)? Are your reports evaluated? Does somebody give you directions as to what to do with the schools?	RESPONSIBILITY TO ACCOUNTABILITY AGENCY RECIPROCITY SYSTEM DESIGN
What is in your view the responsibility of the state and local towards schools on probation? What should the state and the local be held accountable for? How is this reflected in your work?	RECIPROCITY

CASE STUDY INSTRUMENT

MEETING OBSERVATION GUIDE

Main research question:

What is the effect of the RECON/ Probation/STAR policy mix consisting of external threat of sanctions and control, group accountability, presumed goal clarity through performance assessments, mandated improvement process, and (the absence or presence of) additional human and financial resources on the school's strategic planning and coordination, decision making processes, and programmatic development?

By observing meetings (and perhaps clarifying debriefings with meeting participants) can we make inferences on Probation's influence on:
* faculty motivation
* enabling the school's programmatic improvement strategy
* shaping the school's internal decision-making and coordination dynamic.

Observation of meetings will allow us to better understand the effect of main features of accountability designed for high stakes. We directly observe and infer data on the following features of Probation:

Primarily motivational and group-dynamic aspects:

* Top-down threat of sanctions and external control
* Group (i.e. school-as-a-whole) accountability
* Internalization

Primarily strategic aspects:

* Goal clarity (overlapping with motivation)
* Mandated improvement process
* Capacity building measures (e.g. additional resources, professional development)
* Internal accountability

QUESTIONS

Ask yourself the following questions during and after meeting observations:

Motivation/ group dynamics

* Who is in charge of the improvement process?

* Who runs it?

* How does the principal / persons in charge motivate less involved staff?

* Are tasks/ steps / plans openly discussed or are policies commanded?

* Is accountability invoked as an external expectation?

* Are processes of internalizing standards observable?

* Is control over and responsibility for performance assumed by staff?

* Is information widely shared?

* Are decisions made together?

* Does the staff act as a whole?

* Are factions or groupings detectable?

* Do groups or individual members of faculty demand action from colleagues?

* Do the faculty or faculty groups display motivation, or are they going through the motions?

* Is there a sense of the extra-ordinary status and challenge probation entails?

* Is there evidence of external influence (by state monitors, district personnel, etc.)?

Programmatic strategy:

* Is a strategy detectable?

* Does the school pursue changes with a moral purpose or common vision?

* Does the school have an adequate understanding of their problems? Does it focus of internally attributed problems?

* Is the improvement driven by assessment indicators (e.g., tests)?

* Is there a focus on instruction? Are non-instruction related activities seen as intermediate steps?

* What are the school's important steps as detectable in meetings?

* Are steps assessed, strategies revised?

* What kinds of materials and technologies are discussed or introduced?

* What role do new resources play?

* Is there evidence of the usefulness of professional development?

* Are SIP and monitoring / external partner / DE / district influence, etc. conducive to the school's improvement process?

Note: These questions and scenarios are suggestions of what might be most salient. Other avenues that show promise in your cases need to be explored. This instrument needs continuous revision.

MEETINGS

Faculty
SIT
Administrative team
SBMT
Grade level
Department
"House," team, family

CASE REPORT GUIDE

Outline:

External conditions of the school

Keep these questions in the back of your mind when you describe the school's external conditions: *is the school (really) the unit of educational improvement? How does the school buffer external influences, how is it shaped by them? How do external factors hinder or facilitate school improvement?*

The socioeconomic environment

* Describe the neighborhood the school is located in; or the neighborhoods the school draws its students from;
* Is the school a neighborhood school or are students bused in?
* Provide some statistics about the environment (most likely to be found in the SIP);
* Educational load indicators: Free and reduced lunch percentages; students qualifying for Title I, percent of special education students, LEP, other indicators of the school's educational load (e.g., health);
* Neighborhood changes and socio-economic deterioration or improvement;
(* How do educators in the school reflect on their student population and the neighborhoods the school draws from?)

The political, regulatory, and professional environment/ external interference

* Salient district policies that impinged on the school's operation (e.g., school-based management, new master plan, (area) superintendent's initiatives);
* Programs and reforms that the school was mandated to implement in recent years;
* Programs and reforms that the school chose to adopt in recent years;
* Grants the school received;
* Central office supervision;
* Personnel that counsels, monitors the school;
(* Requirements of the accountability system).

The school within the local system

* Reputation of the school (past and present);
* Competition for students with other schools;
* Creaming effects.

Stability of the school

* Teacher turn-over in the last few years (by categories, see below);
* Student turn-over;
* Principal turn-over;
* Percentage of novice, untenured, uncertified teachers;
* Assessment of faculty's level of experience and expertise (principal or external monitor assessment)
* Change in catchment area.
* Number of students transferred out and transferred in for discipline or other problems.

Give an overall description of the stability of the school.

Internal conditions of the school

Description of the school

* Size and grade levels
* Describe the general appearance of the school (building and grounds, hallways, classrooms, pictures, displays, etc.);
* Describe the general orderliness of the school (crowdedness, students in halls, cleanliness, noise level, security measures, bathrooms, graffiti and the like;)
* Describe the general tone in the school from observing student-student interactions; student-teacher interactions (yelling, friendliness?), interactions between researcher and students.

Performance

* Performance history for the last years (preferably since MSPAP);
* MSPAP scores, MFT scores;
* Attendance rates;
* Discipline indicators (referrals, transfers); what infractions are considered serious?

School organization

* Student-teacher ratio
Personnel:
(For the following: How many staff in each category, how is the job organized)
* Describe administration(s): principal, vice principals;
* Counseling office;
* Support staff;
* Specific positions and services (as a result of RECON);
* Teachers on released time;
* Classroom teachers (how many periods; prep period?; common planning time, etc.)

* Average class size; range of class size;

Program:
* Tracking and ability grouping, (since when);
* Houses, families, teams, grade level subdivisions; other sub-divisions;
* Organization and size of special education program;
* Special programs or labs;
* Magnet programs;
* Unique programmatic features of the school;
* After-school activities, sports;
* Tutoring;

Management and leadership

* What is the principal's leadership style?
* Is the school well-managed?
* Do the various components of the school operation interface with each other?
* Is there evidence of conflict among various parts (for example: various grade levels, counseling – classrooms)?
* Are classrooms shielded from interruptions (use of PA system)?
* Is there a climate of serious learning?

Decision making and communication among adults

* Who is in charge? Who runs things and gets things done?
* Who is active, who is inactive (overall estimation of activism/ particular groups)?
* Role of specially assigned personnel;
* Leadership teams;
* What decision-making bodies exist?
* Role of the school improvement team or management team (who is on it, who is in charge?)
* Other relevant teams or groups;
* Teachers union participation?
* Are parents involved?
* PTA (membership, activities);
* Patterns of communication: top-down compliance or open deliberation of issues;

Dealing with accountability and RE-eligibility/in decline

* How do the adults at the school communicate about issues of accountability?
    top-down versus collegial; compliance versus open deliberation; striving for cohesion (pulling-together) versus fragmentation and dissent

* What did the school plan to do about performance or RE-eligibility/in decline?

(Summary of SIP plus other pertinent information)

* What actually happened in the last year and a half?
Describe what you observed. Talk specifically about teacher morale and buy-in into RE, discipline, and instructional upgrading activities.
Use specific examples that illuminate positive and negative aspects of the school's strategies.

CASE REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENT

* Background: Physical, social (SES), school organization

* Performance history: student achievement, attendance, discipline

(Why was the school identified? What is the range of low performance? Has the school improved over the years?)

* School stability: principal turn-over, teacher turn-over, student turn-over, funding

(Can we say that the school is an organization stable enough to engage in a continuous school improvement process?)

* Motivation/ reaction to RECON/ in decline, interpretation of policy (interview and questionnaire data)

(Does proation motivate teachers to work harder/ different/ do teachers and administrators take up the challenge of accountability?)

* Leadership, management
(What is the principal's authority? Do they enforce, mobilize, or accommodate? Do they manage the organization in an orderly fashion?)

* Planning (SIP)
(Is the planning symbolic, restricted to a small cadre, or pervasive?)

* Collegiality, faculty cohesion, faculty involvement

(Do teachers act as a unit? Is there evidence of common understandings and common standards? Do teachers have voice? Are they involved in the process of school improvement?

* Instruction
(What type of instruction did we observe? What other evidence of instruction do we have? How do teachers think about their instruction [from ivw III]?)

* Strategies

Student discipline / family involvement
Instruction
Teacher recruitment and commitment

(Why or why not do these strategies work?)

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE [md]

State: ___________

Identification Number: ______________________

I. Teacher's Background

A. Please provide the following biographical information.

1. What is your age? _______________

2. What is your gender? _______________

3. What is your race? _______________

4. What is the total number of years you have been teaching?________
   4a. In this school? ________ 4b. In this district?________

5. What is the highest degree you hold? less than a B.A.___ , B.A. ___, M.A. ___ , more than M.A.___

6. What grade(s) do you teach this year? ________________________________

7. What subject(s) do you teach this year?________________________________

8. Are you fully certified to teach in the areas or subjects you teach this year? ___ Yes ___ No

9. Are you a special education teacher? ___ Yes ___ No

10. How well do you feel prepared for **this year's** teaching assignment?

    ___ very well prepared
    ___ adequately prepared
    ___ not as well prepared as I need to be
    ___ unprepared

11. Do you work additional hours unrelated to your teaching assignment in this school to increase your salary? ___yes _____no

B. Imagine your colleagues here at school were asked to characterize you as a professional. In your mind, what attributes would they most likely choose? Please select from the list of attributes we have provided and check those that you think are appropriate for you.

___ someone you can trust
___ disciplinarian
___ very hardworking
___ highly educated
___ warm
___ enthusiastic
___ inexperienced
___ someone you can rely on
___ insecure
___ a leader

___ a curriculum specialist
___ a great resource
___ optimist
___ quiet
___ vocal
___ effective
___ very professional
___ average kind of teacher
___ weary
___ very knowledgeable

___ someone needing help
___ an advocate
___ exceptional
___ ineffective
___ has a lot to learn
___ someone who does their job
___ always having good ideas
___ caring
___ gets along well with students

___ thoughtful ___ other: (please specify)___________

C. When you assess whether you have been successful in your teaching, what indicators do you use? Please rank in the order of importance the top five indicators that you use to evaluate yourself . A "1" indicates your most important indicator, a "2" indicates the next most important indicator, and so on.

__ Positive comments from parents
__ Answers from individual students
__ Praise from colleagues
__ Maryland Functional Tests scores
__ Students complete tasks
__ Praise from principal
__ MSPAP scores
__ I just know it in my heart
__ Lively participation of class
__ High test scores on teacher-made test
__ Affection from students

D. With the following question we would like to find out how you see your involvement in the school. How do you rate your present involvement in activities related to school improvement and reconstitution-eligibility? Please circle the appropriate response.

Level of Involvement				
1	2	3	4	5
No Involvement		Medium Involvement		High Involvement

E. In what capacity have you been involved in these activities? Please check each that applies. I have been involved as a(n):

___ administrator
___ chair of a committee
___ member of the school improvement team
___ teacher of my classroom
___ writer of the school improvement plan
___ union representative
___ parent-school coordinator
___ grade level team member
___ master teacher
___ department team member
___ test coordinator
___ school improvement resource teacher
_ counselor
___ teacher with special assignment (e.g., character ed.; reading, resource, etc.)
___ other (please specify):_______________

F. How much of the time do you feel satisfied with your job in this school?

___ Almost always
___ Often
___ Sometimes
___ Almost never

G. With the following question we would like to inquire about your plans of leaving or staying at the school. Which of these six statements MOST reflects your sentiment? Please check one only.

___ At this point, I don't think about leaving or staying at this school. This school is my place.
___ This school means a lot to me. I am committed to staying until it has greatly improved.
___ I have thought about leaving this school, but decided to give it another year.
___ I wish I could transfer to a school with fewer problems and less stress.
___ I am likely to try to leave this school at the end of the school year.
___ I will leave the teaching profession at the end of this year.

H. Please indicate the importance of each of the reasons below for your decision to stay at this school next year. Please rate each of the following statements on a scale from 1-3.

		Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Very Important (3)
1.	The school is close to my home	1	2	3
2.	I like the administration	1	2	3
3.	I play an important role for this community	1	2	3
4.	I like my colleagues	1	2	3
5.	I have friends here	1	2	3
6.	We will prove we are better than it appears	1	2	3
7.	I like the students	1	2	3
8.	I have great hope for the school	1	2	3
9.	Reconstitution-eligibility has greatly energized this school	1	2	3
10.	I have no other option at this point	1	2	3
11.	I am too close to retirement to change schools	1	2	3
12.	Other:____________________	1	2	3

I. Please indicate the importance of each of the reasons below for your decision to leave this school next year. Please rate each of the following statements on a scale from 1-3.

		Not Important (1)	Important (2)	Very Important (3)
1.	The students here wear me down	1	2	3
2.	My work is unappreciated by the community	1	2	3
3.	I do not like the administration	1	2	3
4.	You cannot count on teachers here	1	2	3
5.	The school feels like a sinking ship	1	2	3
6.	I am tired of the additional pressure reconstitution-eligibility has put on this school	1	2	3

7.	This district is not a place where one can be successful as a teacher	1	2	3
8.	I have better career options elsewhere	1	2	3
9.	I can get higher pay elsewhere	1	2	3
10.	I will retire this year	1	2	3
11.	Other:________________	1	2	3

II. Reconstitution Eligibility

A. How much has reconstitution-eligibility affected your work at school?

___ A lot
___ Some
___ A little
___ None
___ I don't know exactly what reconstitution-eligibility is.

B. The following list contains a number of actions that *could* have occurred in your school as a result of reconstitution-eligibility. What has your school done as a result of reconstitution-eligibility? How effective has it been for school improvement?

		Has it occurred?		Effect on School Improvement		
				No Effect	Little Effect	Strong Effect
1.	We have revamped our curriculum	Yes	No	1	2	3
2.	We have used new instructional methods	Yes	No	1	2	3
3.	We have received more attention from the district	Yes	No	1	2	3
4.	We have put new programs in place	Yes	No	1	2	3
5.	We have received more attention from the administration	Yes	No	1	2	3
6.	Teachers go to more meetings	Yes	No	1	2	3
7.	Teachers have many more visitors and observers in their classroom	Yes	No	1	2	3
8.	The administration has tightened procedures	Yes	No	1	2	3
9.	Teachers here have thoroughly reevaluated what they are doing in this school	Yes	No	1	2	3

C. The following statements describe a number of things that might have, or might not have, happened in your school as a result of reconstitution-eligibility. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Agreement				
(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

1. The school has pretty much continued the way it was before 1 2 3 4 5
2. I personally have changed little in my classroom 1 2 3 4 5
3. The spirit of the school has become more optimistic. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Teachers here take MSPAP more seriously. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Things have improved school-wide. 1 2 3 4 5

Agreement				
(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

6. A lot of us teachers work harder 1 2 3 4 5

7. Students work harder 1 2 3 4 5

8. Students have become more disciplined. 1 2 3 4 5

9. We have reaffirmed our commitment to our students 1 2 3 4 5

10. More good teachers have been leaving than weaker ones since the school became reconstitution-eligible 1 2 3 4 5

11. Reconstitution-eligibility was a wake-up call 1 2 3 4 5

12. Teachers have become more anxious about their careers 1 2 3 4 5

13. The school's reputation has been tarnished among parents 1 2 3 4 5

14. Teachers from this faculty try to transfer to other schools that are not reconstitution-eligible 1 2 3 4 5

15. The school has had a harder time attracting strong teachers as new hires since it has become reconstitution-eligible 1 2 3 4 5

16. My work hours have increased 1 2 3 4 5

III. Teacher's Work

A. The following statements have to do with the way you see your work as a teacher. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements using the scale at the top of the page.

1. If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated student 1 2 3 4 5

2. By trying a different teaching method, I can significantly affect a student's achievement 1 2 3 4 5

3. There is really very little I can do to insure that most of my students achieve at a high level. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I am certain I am making a difference in the lives of my students 1 2 3 4 5

5. With more effort, teachers in this school could be much more effective with their students 1 2 3 4 5

6. Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I should be teaching them. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I don't know what to do about the school's low performance on tests 1 2 3 4 5

8. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that usually expected of teachers 1 2 3 4 5

Agreement				
(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

9. My teaching colleagues have the knowledge and skills needed for our school to meet the performance expectations of the state 1 2 3 4 5

10. I believe that I have the skills and knowledge needed for our school to meet the performance expectations of the state 1 2 3 4 5

11. The typical teacher at this school ranks near the top of the teaching profession in knowledge and skills 1 2 3 4 5

12. I know how to teach so that students do well on the MSPAP 1 2 3 4 5

IV. The State's Accountability System

A. The following statements inquire about your ideas and feelings about the state's accountability system (MSPAP and other indicators) that the state applies to evaluate school performance. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements using the scale at the top of the page.

1. The MSPAP test assesses all the things that I find important for students to learn 1 2 3 4 5

2. A good teacher has nothing to fear from the MSPAP 1 2 3 4 5

3. The MSPAP test reflects just plain good teaching 1 2 3 4 5

4. The MSPAP is unrealistic because too many tasks are too hard for our students 1 2 3 4 5

5. By teaching to the MSPAP test, I have to neglect too many skills that our students sorely need 1 2 3 4 5

6. By teaching to all the tests the state requires I have to neglect activities directed towards my students' good citizenship and character 1 2 3 4 5

7. The accountability goals provide a focus for my teaching efforts 1 2 3 4 5

8. The accountability goals tell us what is most important for the school to accomplish 1 2 3 4 5

9. I am not sure exactly what our students are expected to do on the MSPAP 1 2 3 4 5

10. Prior to actual testing, benchmarks and public release items gave me a pretty good idea of the content of the MSPAP 1 2 3 4 5

11. The performance expectations of the state are for the most part unrealistic 1 2 3 4 5

12. It is unrealistic to expect schools that serve poor neighborhoods to perform on the same level as schools in wealthy neighborhoods 1 2 3 4 5

13. Rather than expecting a great improvement in school performance test scores, I concentrate on individual students' growth, no matter how small 1 2 3 4 5

14. It is very important for me personally that the school raises performance scores 1 2 3 4 5

Agreement

(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

14. A high score on the MSPAP means a lot to me 1 2 3 4 5

15. It really doesn't make much difference to me whether this school gets off the reconstitution-eligibility list 1 2 3 4 5

16. It says nothing about me personally as a teacher whether the school raises its performance score or not. 1 2 3 4 5

17. Our students are not behind because of the teachers they have, but because of the conditions under which they have to grow up 1 2 3 4 5

18. For the most part, teachers here are unfairly judged by the accountability system. 1 2 3 4 5

19. The state has sent us a signal, and it's time for teachers to shape up 1 2 3 4 5

20. I feel that I am working to my best ability and effort despite the low scores the school received 1 2 3 4 5

21. I resent being judged based on the performance of other teachers on the basis of school-wide test scores. 1 2 3 4 5

23. The accountability system is stacked against schools located in poor communities 1 2 3 4 5

24. If somebody from the state or the district thinks they can do a better job than teachers here, let them take over. 1 2 3 4 5

25. We should be honored for teaching students from underprivileged backgrounds rather than be told we are not doing enough 1 2 3 4 5

B. Accountability systems are fairly new in American education. All kinds of ideas may have to be tried out to find a system that works well. Below we list a number of statements that indicate which ideas you find agreeable depending on your experience within the Maryland accountability system. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements.

1. The Maryland accountability system should remain as is 1 2 3 4 5

2. Schools should primarily be evaluated based on basic skills tests rather than performance-based tests 1 2 3 4 5

3. Student achievement tests used for school performance evaluation should count towards students' promotion or graduation 1 2 3 4 5

4. The quality of a school should not be based on quantitative test scores and rates, but on the holistic evaluation of inspectors who know the school well 1 2 3 4 5

5. Teachers should be evaluated individually based on a year's student growth indicated by scores on pre and post tests 1 2 3 4 5

6. The whole design of school accountability in Maryland is faulty; you cannot hold *teachers* accountable for *students'* learning 1 2 3 4 5

C. The following list contains various elements of the accountability system. Are these elements present in your school? How effective has each element been for school improvement?

	Has it occurred?		Effect on school improvement		
			No Effect	Little Effect	Strong Effect
a. Provision of new funds	Yes	No	1	2	3
b. New personnel (e.g., master teacher, teacher responsible for school improvement)	Yes	No	1	2	3
c. Forming of school improvement team	Yes	No	1	2	3
d. Development of School Improvement Plan	Yes	No	1	2	3
e. Presence of district support staff	Yes	No	1	2	3
f. Presence of state monitor	Yes	No	1	2	3
g. Provision of professional development activities	Yes	No	1	2	3

Name the professional development activities that you found most helpful, if any: ______________________

D. Do you understand what reconstitution-eligibility means for your school?

___ I understand clearly.
___ I have a vague idea.
___ I don't know.

E. Are you familiar with the school improvement plan?

___ I am familiar with the plan in detail.
___ I am familiar with the section of the plan in detail that has to do with my department/grade/function at school.
___ I have a cursory idea of what is in the plan.
___ I have a vague idea of what is in the plan.
___ I have not had a chance yet to familiarize myself with the plan.

F. Could you recite at this moment the school's quantitative performance goals?

___ All of them
___ Some of them
___ I am not sure.

G. Have you personally had contact with a *state* monitor?

___ intense contact
___ talked with him/her
___ he/she visited my classroom
___ he/she conducted a workshop
___ saw him/her in the hall
___ no contact
___ don't know

H. Have you personally had contact with a *district* coach or monitor?

___ intense contact
___ talked with him/her
___ he/she visited my classroom
___ he/she conducted a workshop
___ saw him/her in the hall
___ no contact
___ don't know

V. Life in Your School

A. In the next section we ask you to give us some information on what it is like to work in your school. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the statements.

Agreement				
(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

1. The school administration's behavior towards the staff is supportive and encouraging 1 2 3 4 5
2. The principal sets priorities, makes plans, and sees that they are carried out. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The principal puts pressure on teachers to get results. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced in this school. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The principal usually consults with staff members before he/she makes decisions that affect teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
6. In this school, the principal tells us what the district and the state expect of us, and we comply 1 2 3 4 5
7. Staff members are recognized for a job well done 1 2 3 4 5
8. Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be 1 2 3 4 5
9. There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff here 1 2 3 4 5
10. I can count on colleagues here when I feel down about my teaching or my students 1 2 3 4 5
11. In this school, the faculty discusses major decisions and sees to it that they are carried out 1 2 3 4 5
12. The same small group of people sits on most of the active committees, and is involved in most of the new projects and programs here 1 2 3 4 5
13. In this school, reconstitution-eligibility is primarily the concern of the principal and of teachers with release time on their hands 1 2 3 4 5

Agreement				
(1) Strongly Agree	(2) Agree	(3) Neutral	(4) Disagree	(5) Strongly Disagree

14. I have enough challenges in my own classroom so that I don't pay as much attention to the whole school 1 2 3 4 5

15. Reconstitution-eligibility actually helps the hardworking teachers and administrators in this school by putting pressure on the ones that work less hard 1 2 3 4 5

16. In this school, a few teachers carry the load of improving the school for the majority 1 2 3 4 5

17. In this school reconstitution-eligibility makes the hardworking teachers work even harder, but has no effect on the ones that need to improve the most 1 2 3 4 5

18. Being reconstitution-eligible as a whole school has brought the faculty together. Almost everyone is making a contribution 1 2 3 4 5

19. My job provides me with continuing professional stimulation and growth 1 2 3 4 5

20. Teachers in this school are continually learning and seeking new ideas 1 2 3 4 5

21. The staff seldom evaluates its programs and activities 1 2 3 4 5

B. What are your expectations for the school to improve?

1. This school will noticeably improve in the near future:

___ I am absolutely certain.
___ I am certain.
___ I don't know.
___ I am doubtful.
___ I am very doubtful.

C. There is only a finite amount of time and energy available for a school to improve. Every school has to work on different things in order to improve. We would like to know how you would prioritize the school's top challenges at this moment. Please check the three most critical areas for your school:

___New pedagogical theory
___Child psychology
___New instructional methods
___Student referral system
___Counseling office
___Teacher team work
___Communication among faculty

___Motivation of teachers
___Stabilizing faculty turn-over
___Work place environment
___Spirit of the school
___Respect for teachers
___Student discipline
___Performance-based pedagogy
___New instructional materials

___Cleanliness of building
___New textbooks
___Teacher-parent relationships
___Enforcement of homework policies
___Teacher-student relationships
___Student health and nutrition
___Other:_______________

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

Please add any additional comments you may wish to make.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

CODEBOOK

About this Document

This document lists a number of domains that are commonly mentioned in school improvement plans and suggests ways of classification. Where possible I have added the implied "theory of change" of reconstitution policies (i.e. possible impact of RE/STAR probationary status on school change), the hunch/ hypothesis with which we pursue our content analysis, or sometimes specific research questions guiding the investigation.

Under each domain, I have listed a number of detailed items that appear in some of the improvement plans (SIP/STP). The list is not complete. Items will be added as we continue the content analysis of more plans.We will create a data spreadsheet for each school in MS ACCESS. Raters will read the plans and immediately enter their ratings into the spreadsheet. In this way, we avoid cumbersome coding of the actual hard copies of the plans.

The data set for the plans consists of lists of items, ratings, summary ratings, and short statement fields. The analysis for each school will be completed by two raters.

Suggested Domains and Classifications for the Analysis

SCHOOL PROFILE DATA

NEEDS/ DECLINE / FAILURE ANALYSIS

PHILOSOPHY/ MISSION

GOALS

ACTIVITIES

RESPONSIBILITIES

EVALUATION

STRATEGY

SCHOOL PROFILE DATA
* performance scores
* attendance rates
* retention rates
* school climate indicators
* SES indicator: percent of free and reduced lunch
* Title I funding

- number of years on probation
- size of student population
- average class size
- number of teachers
- years of experience
- absentee rate
- yearly staff turn-over
- new/ old principal
- percentage of fully certified/ provisional/ substitute teachers
- educational level of staff

DOMAIN 1: NEEDS / DECLINE/ FAILURE ANALYSIS

Probationary status forces the school to acknowledge shortcomings, take a "hard look" at what must be improved and can be improved internally, and assume responsibility for results. On the other hand, schools may want to conceal failure from the public eye. Educators in the schools may concede apparent shortcomings as evidenced by test scores and the like, but will circumvent the analysis of actual administrator and teacher performance (e.g., varied teacher knowledge and motivation, instructional strategies). Instead the plans may hint at resource and environmental deficiencies, externalizing failure.

1A) EVIDENCE OF NEEDS

Basic questions
What **evidence** is presented (conditions, facts, figures) for the diagnosis of shortcomings?

Name conditions, facts, figures mentioned in the plan.

Possible answers:
* low student achievement scores
* low attendance
* high retention rate
* high suspension rate
* negative school climate measures
add others.

For each item rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
(1) The plan uses only publicly accessible data.
(2) The plan uses publicly accessible data and data generated at the site according to system requirements.
(3) The plan uses data mentioned under (1) and (2) and additional evidence generated by the school (perhaps through self study).

1B) CAUSES OF DECLINE

Basic question:
What **causes** for decline are mentioned?

Possible answers:
(Internal attribution)
* limitations in teachers' skills and knowledge (e.g., teaching out of the area)
* teacher and administrator motivation (e.g., "burn-out", absences, substitutes, turn-over)
* organizational-structural / programmatic shortcomings
* leadership weaknesses (e.g., new administration, principal turn-over)
* neglect of specific skill/knowledge development

(External attribution)
* difficult students
* scarce resources
* difficult socio-economic environment
* district policies
* unusual format of assessment
* student learning motivation
* lack of parent interest
* other extenuating circumstances (list)

Add others.

Categories
(1) internal attribution
(2) external attribution

Ratings of strength
For each item rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
(1) Decline is merely acknowledged
(2) Decline is primarily externalized
(3) Decline is primarily externalized, but internal factors are mentioned
(4) Decline is primarily internalized (i.e. attributed to educators' actions, abilities, motivations)
(5) Decline is **equally** attributed to internal and external factors

Brief summary statement: How does the school analyze its decline?
Prepare a brief statement based on items, ratings, and Summary ratings.

1C USE OF DATA FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Basic question:
What type of data is used for needs assessment/ analysis of decline?
With what degree of sophistication does the school analyze?

Possible items:
* use of summary test scores
* use of performance indices
* use of summary data on student behavior
* use of disaggregated data on student behavior
* use of disaggregated data on student achievement by student group
* use of disaggregated data by subject or curricular area
* use of disaggregated data by particular learning operation
* use of school surveys
* use of data on teacher performance
* use of disaggregated data on teacher performance
* use of qualitative data from inquiry or self study
* use of data based on professional experience
* use of interview data
* use of observational data
*

Summary ratings:
Degree of sophistication
Quantitative analysis is rich with :
(3) disaggregated data and summary data
(2) primarily summary data
(1) little or no use of quantitative data

Qualitative analysis is rich with:
(4) qualitative data-based insights
(3) experiential evidence
(2) little evidence for statements
(1) little or no use of qualitative data

DOMAIN 2: PHILOSOPHY / MISSION

Schools on probation focus on the achievement of their students. They increase expectations for their students' success and acknowledge in their philosophy the school's responsibility for student performance. On the other hand, mission statements, rather than revealing a conscious process of reflection on goals and ethics of the school and essentials of the change process, are an unspecific conglomerate of presently "correct" ideological clichés.

Possible types of philosophical tenets:
* all students can learn
* high expectations for our students
* preparation for the new technological age
* preparation for the competitive society
* development of individual students to their fullest potential
* contributing to democratic community/ society/ citizenship
* assuming responsibility for student performance
* school as family or community
* fostering authentic pedagogy / performance-based learning
* creating an atmosphere of trust and caring

Add others

Ratings of strength
For each item rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
(1) Mission/ philosophy is an unspecific conglomerate of clichés.
(2) Mission/ philosophy exhibits coherence and focus.
(3) Mission/ philosophy exhibits coherence, focus, and school-specific tenets.

DOMAIN 3: GOALS

Basic question

What goals does the school pursue in its plan? RE/STAR policies encourage schools to emphasize student achievement and measurable goals in their orientation for change. External goals may be restated without reflection on gap between external expectations and student performance.

List goals mentioned in the plan:
*
*

Categories
(1) student values
(2) teacher (educator) values
(3) student conduct
(4) teacher conduct
(5) parent conduct or values
(6) student achievement
(7) adult performance
(8) organizational change
(9) system change

Ways of monitoring
(1) numerical
(2) measurable (generally), e.g., document deposited with principal, minutes
(3) defined behaviors
(4) statements of intention

Degree of achievability
(1) realistically achievable within the time frame of the plan [compare goals with previous growth]
(2) not realistically achievable within the time frame of the plan

Summary ratings
(1) The majority of goals tend to be vague
(2) The majority of goals tend to be specific
(3) The majority of goals are specific and easily measurable
(4) Goals reflecting more diffuse core ideas of change are in balance with specific and measurable goals

Brief summary statement:
Is a certain character of goal statements identifiable?

DOMAIN 4: IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Probationary status propels the school to focus and to align their program with the standards and assessments of the system and to search for new ideas that lead to effective changes at the failing school. If, indeed, a crucial concern of identified schools is the repair of their discredited legitimacy, it can be expected that ideas being proffered in the SIP's are foremost those that have professional or public currency at present. If, indeed, the threat of RE/STAR leads to rigidity effects, it can be expected that the school will tighten up on standard operations, i.e. the plans will contain many conventional ideas that amount to "more of the same." Experimentation would be discouraged.

For all items in Domain 4:

Ratings of strength
For each item rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

4A) Organization:

Basic Question:
To what degree does probationary status encourage overhaul of the school organization/ adding of organizational features (programs, specializations) to the standard organizational structure?

Possible items mentioned:
* creating new courses
* tracking
* detracking
* after-school extended services
* tutorials
* houses, families
* advisory period or section
* schools-within-school
* study periods
* single-gender classes
* new specialized role (attendance clerk, counselor, psychologist, para-professional).
* new service
* new master schedule
* renovating building
* cleaning up building
* planning periods
* new teams
* class size
Add others

Categories
(1) new specialized service or role
(2) overhaul of existing service or role
(3) part of whole-school overhaul

4B) Climate:
Question: Are measures suggested that go beyond what schools have been doing in the past anyway? How is the creation of personally more meaningful relationships be expressed in SIP's? Is this an area of concern in the plans?

Possible items mentioned in the plan:
* awards (1)
* awards assemblies (1)
* spirit days / rewards (1)
* display of student work (1)
* clean-up days (1)
* multicultural assemblies/ activities (1)
* athletics (1)
* service learning (1)
* community involvement of students (1) [or in next sub-domain]
* conflict resolution programs (2)
* self-esteem programs (5 or 2)
* buddy systems (4)
* peer counseling (4)
* more parent-teacher conferences (2)
* establishing or tightening of referral system (2)
* strengthening of counseling department (2)
* collecting information on discipline/ retention/ attendance (2)
* study hall for discipline cases (2)
* new get-tough policies (2)
* classroom management assistance for poorly performing teachers (2)
* peer or team responsibility for discipline (2)
* abolition of specialized counselors (2)
* student-teacher conferences (4 or 2)
* school-wide discipline plan (2)
* posting rules and norms (2)
* tightening attendance procedures (attendance clerk, attendance bulletin) (3)
* hall monitors (2)
* mental health team (6)
* strengthening ties between students and adult advisors (4)
* stable learning groups (4)
* stable relationships between teachers and learning groups (4)
* individualization of instruction (4)
* formulating new organizational philosophy (7)
* deepening understanding of organizational philosophy (7)

Categories
(1) school spirit
(2) discipline
(3) attendance
(4) personalization
(5) learning motivation
(6) learning readiness (health, nutrition)
(7) organizational philosophy

Ratings of strength
For the **area of school climate**, rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
(1) Climate activities are suggested without clear focus
(1) Climate activities primarily focus on tightening up procedures
(2) Climate activities primarily focus on cultural reorientation of the school
(3) Climate activities primarily focus on cultural reorientation of school and classroom

4C) Parents and community

Question: Do schools pursue these contacts with a discernible objective?

Possible items:
* parent nights
* plays/ performances
* parent workshops
* increased frequency of report cards
* regular home calls
* parent and community newsletter
* business/ university partnerships
* joining professional networks
* contact to neighborhood associations/ churches
* establishing trust
* open discussion on racism, cultural, class differences between school and home
* giving parent representatives power in school decision making
* community involvement model
Add others

Ratings of strength
For the **area of parent and community relationships**, rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

4D) Governance / coordinated action

Implied theory of action:
By holding the school as a whole accountable RE/STAR policies foster more cohesion and unified action.

Question: Is the quest for collective responsibility and increased unity reflected in the improvement plans?

Possible items:
* formation of SBDM council
* enlarging representativeness of council or other governance bodies
* steering committee
* school improvement team
* new administrative structure in school
* new teams (generally)
* accountability managers
* internal monitors
* external auditors
* state monitors/ distinguished educators
* integration of external school reform partner
* new channels to district
* decision making procedures (e.g., learning to reach consensus)
* conflict resolution
* union participation
* task forces and committees
* review teams

For the **area of governance/ coordinated action**, rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
(1) Disjointed activities in the area of g/ca are suggested without clear objective
(2) A number of loosely connected activities are suggested that are to foster better coordination
(3) A clear concern for coordinated action is discernible
(4) A clear concern for collective responsibility and coordinated action is discernible

4E) Teacher performance and commitment

As a "no more excuses" policy, RE/STAR assumes that pressure and raising the stakes will work to motivate teachers to increase performance. In the spirit of RE/STAR, SIP's/STP's will neglect teacher commitment altogether in their improvement strategy.

* lesson plans
* increased supervision
* sign-out sheets
* mentoring
* etc.

Ratings
For the **area of teacher performance**, rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan: (4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

4F) Curriculum and instruction

Characteristically schools attend to a multitude of goals. RE/STAR policies focus the school on student achievement as measured by the test. Programs may be featured highly, organizational learning or experimentation will be less frequent.

Possible items:
* test-taking workshops or instructional units
* developing list of test words
* curriculum alignment (rewriting of curriculum guides)
* drill and practice of test items
* writing prompts
* portfolios
* planning test-specific activities
* remediating identified curricular weaknesses (e.g., remedying lack of knowledge in area)
* adopting packaged program
* interdisciplinary units or lessons
* combination of subjects
* multiple-intelligences activities, diverse learning styles
* cooperative learning activities
* writing process
* writing across the curriculum
* developing new performance-based units across subject matter disciplines
* complete and staged overhaul of taught curriculum
* ambitious projects
* team planning of new units
* changing basic lesson format (student-centeredness, direct instruction, skill/ whole language)
* philosophical re-orientation of pedagogy through packaged professional development program (e.g., Dimensions of Learning

* philosophical re-orientation through self-study by departments/ collegial teams (new standards, new materials)
* on-going experimentation with curriculum and instruction

Categories
(1) Test or assessment related activities
(2) Discrete programs
(3) Organizational learning
(4) Experimentation

Summary ratings:
C and I activities
(1) are neglected
(2) are central, but primarily related to test
(3) are central, but primarily additive and discrete activities or programs
(4) are central and aimed at curricular and pedagogical overhaul

4G: Materials:

Materials will be big on the list. Textbooks and technology are relatively teacher-immune ways of reforming schools.

Possible items mentioned:
* access to Internet
* new computers
* new software
* improving media center/ library
* new textbooks
* new curricular materials
* security devices
* attendance technology
* monitoring technology

Ratings
For the **area of materials**, rate the degree of importance attached to it in the plan:
(4) very important, (3) important, (2) acknowledged, (1) not acknowledged

Summary ratings
Purchase/ use of new material is suggested
(1) as a solution in itself
(2) as an important element in conjunction with changes in human interaction
(3) as a mere ingredient in conjunction with changes in human interaction

4H) Professional development

Basic question:
Is there a specific type of professional development that RE/STAR probationary status encourages? It is possible that stringent accountability requirements encourage schools to focus their prof dev activities on discrete, easily monitored activities, rather than on-going inquiry and reflection.

Format of professional development:
(1) classes, workshops
(2) meetings
(3) forming teams
(4) task forces / committees
(5) on-going self-study / inquiry teams
(7) coaching, peer support
(8) classroom visits
(9) visits of community
(10) professional networking
(11) retreats

Content:
(1) subject matter
(For example, reading, writing, math, science, social studies, technology, art)
(2) student conduct
(For example, discipline, learning motivation, student participation)
(3) shared decision making
(4) sensitivity to community
(5) counseling
(6) special ed
(7) pedagogical theory
(8) philosophy
(9) student discipline

List specific courses or activities
*

Summary ratings:
(4) Prof dev is primarily ongoing reflection and inquiry and concentrates on key points of change
(3) Prof dev is primarily ongoing reflection and inquiry, but is loosely structured and vague
(2) Prof dev consists primarily of limited and formal activities that are tied together by a common strategy
(1) Prof dev consists primarily of limited and formal activities that are unconnected with each other.

Brief summary statement:
professional development as:
ongoing -- limited activity
formal training -- informal teacher inquiry
focused on areas of concentration — scattered activities

DOMAIN V: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In the conventional model of school reform, schools change by adding new features (structures, responsibilities, programs) to their organizations and tend to assign responsibility for these efforts to specialized service roles or administrators, or alternatively assign responsibility to all stakeholders without holding anyone specifically responsible.

TO BE ADDED AS AN ENTRY TO EACH ACTIVITY (Multiple selections possible)

Categories
(1) principal and other administrators
(2) classroom teachers (general)
(3) subject matter departments
(4) grade level teams
(5) other specified classroom teacher groups
(6) support staff
(7) counselors
(8) specialized services in school (Special Ed, psychologist, etc.)
(9) specialized services (outside of school)
(10) attendance clerks
(11) para-professionals
(12) students
(13) parents
(14) district administrators
(15) external partners
(16) policy makers
(17) the whole school
(18) the whole system
(19) society

Is an individual named? Yes: 1, No: 0

Summary ratings 1:

Responsibility for goals and activities is
(4) clearly given to identifiable individual(s) or to one small task oriented group for each activity
(3) somewhat clear, i.e. given to larger groups
(2) vague, i.e. responsibilities are assigned to whole stakeholder groups
(1) very vague, i.e. responsibilities are given to several stakeholder groups

Summary ratings 2:
(1) Responsibility assigned primarily to administration and specialized services
(2) ----assigned primarily to classroom teachers
(3) ----assigned primarily to external actors
(4) ----assigned primarily to students
(5) ----assigned primarily to school improvement team
(6) ----nobody assumes primary responsibility

DOMAIN VI: RESOURCES

RE/STAR is a policy that is not primarily designed to attract more resources to the school (certain reallocation of funds notwithstanding); instead it aims to increase teacher performance and to intensify teachers' work. Some schools will not resist the temptation to write the SIP or STP as a plea for more resources.

Basic question:
What does the school do with resources? (Multiple selections possible)
(1) shifting of available resources
(2) banking on soft external monies
(3) banking on new system-internal resources
(4) use of federal Title I funds
(5) no change in resource flows planned
(6) source for resources unclear

Summary ratings 1:
Expectation of availability of fund for improvement strategy:
(1) substantially more
(2) little more
(3) same as before
(4) fewer
(5) far fewer funds

Summary ratings 2:
(1) SIP reads more like a proposal for outside monies
(2) SIP reads more like a document for internal self-study
(3) SIP maintains a balance of documentation of needs towards external environment and internal self-study.

DOMAIN VII: EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

RE/STAR policies focus schools on measurable goals and emphasize visible accountability. In MD and KY, the test provides a diagnostic tool for evaluation. However, the connection between an activity and its effect is often loose, making evaluation of on-going activities difficult.

TO BE ADDED AS AN ENTRY TO EACH ACTIVITY:

(1) new
(2) on-going

** Do new activities follow from past activities?*

Rate for each :
(1) positive evaluation
(2) negative evaluation
(3) no evaluation

DOMAIN VIII: STRATEGY

The STRATEGY DOMAIN is subdivided into:
Alignment
Focus
Consistency

The STRATEGY DOMAIN requires you to look at domains simultaneously. Pay particular attention to the following domains::

* EVIDENCE OF NEED/ Decline
* CAUSES
* GOALS
* ACTIVITIES

Alignment —
For each activity:
Activities follow from needs/ decline analysis
(3) tightly, (2) loosely, (1) not at all

Summary ratings:
Do activities follow from goals? (4) always, (3) in the majority of cases, (2) in the minority of cases, (1) (almost) never.
Do activities provide remedies for identified evidence of need and causes for decline?
(4) always, (3) in the majority of cases, (2) in the minority of cases, (1) (almost) never.

Focus --
Is a rank order of importance of activities discernible in the plan?
(3) strongly, (2) weakly, (1) not

For each activity: [TO BE ADDED TO EACH ACTIVITY]
(1) exclusive attention
(2) strong focus
(3) finds mentioning among several equally important areas
(4) finds mentioning among several areas whose level of importance is unclear

Consistency
Summary ratings
(3) All suggested activities can be grouped around a common vision of what the school should look like in the future, or of what the change process should look like.
(2) At least the most important activities can be grouped around a common vision of what the school should look like in the future, or of what the change process should look like.
(1) A common vision of the future school or the change process is not discernable in the activities. Activities do not relate to a common vision of what the school should look like in the future, or of what the change process should look like.

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